

sojourners

August 2017 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

CONFESSIONS OF A FORMER WHITE SUPREMACIST

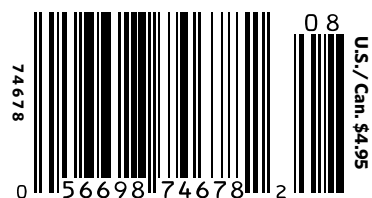


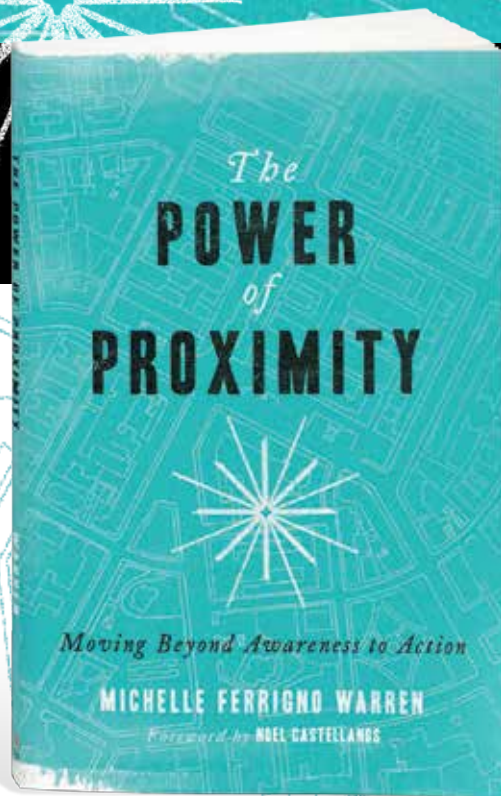
PLUS:

A moral response to cyberattacks

After ISIS: Can Iraqi Christians go home again?

Wendell Berry's vision of place





AWARENESS IS NOT ENOUGH

"In this book, Michelle Warren dares us to follow the suffering Christ by leaning into the suffering of our world. She calls us not to conform to the patterns of this world, which might otherwise convince us to move out of Jesus' neighborhood."

—SHANE CLAIBORNE

How proximate are you to the poor?

Take the quiz at IVPRESS.COM/PROXIMITYINDEX.

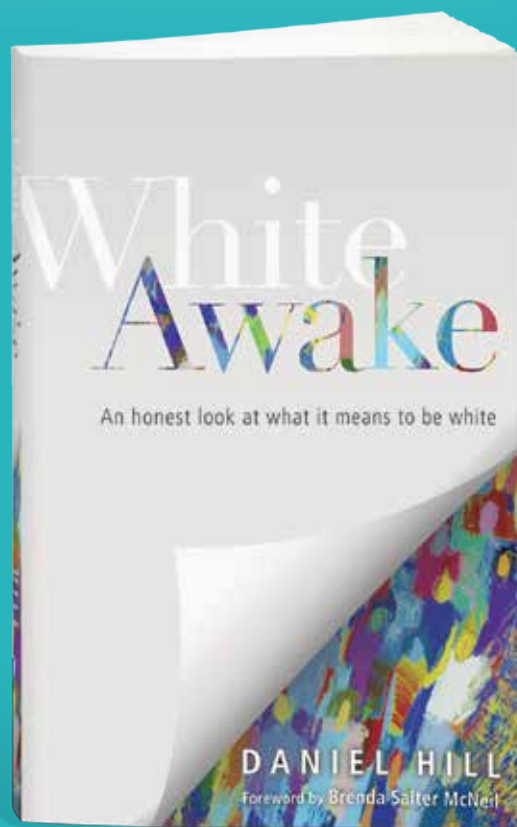
WAKING UP TO THE Whiteness OF MY WORLD

"Daniel Hill sought me out as a mentor over two decades ago, and it has been a joy to watch the progress of him and his church. . . . In this book, you will find fresh thinking around the critical topic of race, and I would encourage every Christian to read it."

—JOHN M. PERKINS

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 2017

Preorder at IVPRESS.COM/WHITE-AWAKE.





sojo

contents

AUGUST 2017 Vol. 46 | No. 8

COVER

16 Confessions of a Former White Supremacist

Tony McAleer was a neo-Nazi. Now he works against hate.
by Jason Byassee

FEATURES

22 Release to the Captives

Early Christians went way beyond prison reform.
by Ryan Schellenberg

28 After ISIS

Can Iraqi Christians go home again?
by Anna Lekas Miller

32 Skin in the Game

How could I stay in a church that ignored my brutalized past?
by Ruth Everhart

36 Better Than a Wall

In Mexico, rural farmers build an alternative to emigration.
by Annelise Jolley

CULTURE WATCH

40 Wendell Berry's vision of place

Reviews: *Always with Us?*; *The Art of Death*; *The Kind of Brave You Wanted to Be*; *The New Urban Crisis*; *Holy Spokes*

42 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

43 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Morality and cyberattacks

9 A seamless garment

10 Mandatory sentences

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

12 Homepage

47 Poetry

48 Living the Word by Wil Gafney

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds by Jim Wallis

14 Deep Economy by Bill McKibben

20 Unfiltered by Kathy Khang

26 The Hungry Spirit by Rose Marie Berger

50 H'rumphs by Ed Spivey Jr.



Master of Social Work

Department of Social Work ■ BSW and MSW Programs

Put Compassion Into Action

Azusa Pacific University's Master of Social Work program prepares students for a career dedicated to improving the lives of others in a variety of professional settings, locally and around the world.

- Full-time, part-time, and Advanced Standing options
- Internships in the Greater Los Angeles area
- Two concentrations: Clinical Practice or Community Leadership and Program Administration
- Excellent scholarship opportunities, including HRSA (up to \$50,000), and L.A. County DCFS Title IV-E two-year stipend program (\$18,500 per year)
- Integration of faith and social work practice

Apply today!

Visit apu.edu/msw/, email kmaynard@apu.edu, or call (626) 857-2400.

901 E. Alosta Ave., Azusa, CA 91702



LOVING THY NEIGHBOR may be one of the greatest commandments, but loving thy enemies is surely the hardest. In the past few months, we've seen an outpouring of the former: crowds rallying at airports to welcome refugees; churches, cities, and campuses establishing sanctuary for undocumented immigrants; courageous bystanders intervening to protect strangers from harassment and violence.

But when it comes to loving the very people who have caused real harm to us and our neighbors—for example, peddlers of fake news, white nationalists, and members of certain presidential administrations—the crowd grows thin. And understandably so:

Why should we extend love to those who perpetuate a politics of hate? What would loving those people even look like?

Former white nationalist Tony McAleer has an answer. As co-founder of Life After Hate, a nonprofit that helps people leave extremist groups, McAleer has seen how small gestures of compassion can transform those consumed by hate. So when McAleer met a young veteran inching toward anti-Islam extremism, he took him to meet a local imam. "It's incredibly powerful to receive compassion from someone you've dehumanized," McAleer tells Jason Byassee in our cover story.



Of course, loving your enemies does not mean condoning their actions. Neither does it mean a disregard for the safety or well-being of those who an enemy may harm, including ourselves. Yet even with these caveats, it's impossible to domesticate Jesus' commandment: Seeking restoration rather than retribution for those who do evil is truly radical. As Martin Luther King Jr. put it, nonviolent enemy-love forces us to recognize "that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people." Try thinking about that the next time you see a sound bite of your least favorite politician. ■

Letters

Pricing Carbon Fuels

Thank you for your fine article on climate change ("Shattering the Silence on Climate Change" by Teresa Myers, Connie Roser-Renouf, and Edward Maibach, May 2017). There is no larger long-term challenge facing humankind. The mention of Citizen's Climate Lobby deserves expansion. This grassroots, nonpartisan, national group has a very workable, market-friendly proposal to help us move forward: enacting a steadily rising federal fee on all carbon-based fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas). The net revenues from this fee would be returned on an equal per capita basis to all legal U.S. residents. Such a fee would correct a failure of the market to properly price the environmental and social costs associated with use of these resources. It would have a positive impact on economic growth, would favor a transition to nonpolluting energy resources, and would be fair to low-income residents.

Kenneth Piers
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Pride of Milwaukee

One of the names in Lisa Sharon Harper's "Find the Cost of Freedom" (May 2017) was instantly familiar to me: James Cameron, the only young man "spared" from lynching, by imprisonment. I only wish Harper could have gone further in highlighting Cameron's life. Having lived most of my life

We still blame the poor as "not being responsible."

in the Milwaukee metro area, I have heard so much about Cameron—an extremely studious man and founder of the Black Holocaust Museum, a one-of-a-kind exhibition. Cameron was an exemplary man. He should be much more well-known than he is, and for much more than that he escaped a lynching. He was (and still is, as his heritage lives on) a very important man for Milwaukee residents.

Lynne Gonzales
Pewaukee, Wisconsin

Heartless Housing Policy

I was very happy to read the recent article "Raise Your Hand if You Live in Subsidized Housing" by Neeraj Mehta (June 2017). It helps to uncover how we "allocate resources to people we value" and shows the inequality of how we subsidize housing in America. From my work with Hearts for Homes in Macomb County, Mich., it is clear to me that negative biases and stereotypes of low-income renters justify inaction on the part of policy makers and middle-class Americans. With the numbers of homeless children on the rise, at a time when employment is the highest since 2001, we still easily blame the poor as "not being responsible" or "having bad spending habits." However, we seem

unable to acknowledge or take responsibility for a housing system that requires many families to pay more than half of their income in housing expenses, putting many at risk of homelessness.

Richard Cannon
Mt. Clemens, Michigan

Cone's Cross

Reading Danny Duncan Collum's piece on Reinhold Niebuhr ("The Niebuhr We Need," April 2017) and viewing the new documentary by Martin Doblmeier sent me back to my own review of America's cold war theologian ("Apologist of Power," March 1987). I write to commend James Cone's chapter on Niebuhr in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2011). Cone argues that Niebuhr's theology of the cross was so abstract that it never occurred to him to recognize the most obvious representation of the former in the latter. Though still faculty at Union Seminary, Cone was not interviewed for the film.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann
Detroit, Michigan

Your response here. Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

sojourners

President/Editor-in-Chief, Jim Wallis
Chief Executive Officer, Robert Wilson-Black
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer,
 Michael Norman
Vice President, Human Resources, Karen L. Lattea

Editor, Jim Rice
Art Director, Ed Spivey Jr.
Senior Associate Editors,
 Rose Marie Berger, Julie Polter
Associate Editor, Betsy Shirley

Senior Director of Circulation and Production,
 Cynthia J. Martens
Director of Advertising Sales, Sandra Sims
Advertising Sales Associate, Katie Zimmerman

Chief Advancement Officer, Larisa Friesen Hall
**Senior Director of Foundation Relations and
 Performance Officer**, Lisa Daughtry-Weiss
Director of Major Gifts, Kaitlin Hasseler
Director of Individual Giving, Beth Cooper-Chrismon
Donor Services Associate, Rachel Buller
Development Associate, Planned Giving,
 Ferial Pietersen Ricks

Web Editor and Chief Digital Officer, Sandi Villarreal
Director of Web and Digital Technology, Bob Sabath
Senior Associate Web Editor, Catherine Woodiwiss
Multimedia Editor, JP Keenan
Audience Engagement Editor, Layton E. Williams
Associate Web Editor, Dhanya Addanki

Chief Church Engagement Officer, Lisa Sharon Harper
Church Engagement Administrative Assistant, David Potter
Director of Advocacy and Communications,
 Michael Mershon
Climate Justice Campaign Associate, Alaura Carter
Press Coordinator, Jazmine T. Steele
Immigration Campaign Associate, Jessica Cobian
Women and Girls Campaign Associate, Jenna Barnett

Accountant, Brion Thomas
Summit Director, Elizabeth Denlinger Reaves
Office Manager, Simon Oh
Assistant to the President, J.K. Granberg-Michaelson
Senior Adviser to the President, James Simpson
Intern Program Director, Melanie Weldon-Soiset

Interns: Peter Armstrong, *Executive*; Laura Beard, *Summit
 and Administration*; David Beltrán, *Circulation*; Hannah
 Critchfield, *Donor Services*; Avery Davis, *Campaigns
 and Communications*; Lucy M. Hadley, *Campaigns and
 Communications*; DaShawn Mosley, *Online*; Sammi Sluder,
Advertising; Jasper Vaughn, *Editorial*

Contributing Editors: Diana Butler Bass, Melvin Bray,
 Walter Brueggemann, Majora Carter, Joan Chittister, Eugene
 Cho, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Edwidge
 Danticat, Marie Dennis, John Dilulio, E.J. Dionne Jr., Valerie
 Elverton Dixon, Reta Halteman Finger, Wes Granberg-
 Michaelson, David P. Gushee, Adam Hamilton, Obery
 Hendricks, Gareth Higgins, Joel Hunter, Lynne Hybels, Daisy
 Khan, Anne Lamott, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Donald
 Miller, Ched Myers, Eboo Patel, John Perkins, Samuel
 Rodriguez, Richard Rohr, Ron Sider, Barbara Brown Taylor,
 Cornel West, Lauren Winner, Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Tyler
 Wigg Stevenson, Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Contributing Writers: Onleilove Alston, Frida Berrigan,
 Michaela Bruzzese, Kimberly Burge, Judy Cooe, David
 Cortright, Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, Bob Hulteen, Jesse
 Nathan, Brittany Shoot, Kari Jo Verhulst, Andrew Wilkes,
 Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Tobias Winright

Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly,
 except September-October is combined, at 408 C Street NE,
 Washington, DC 20002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington,
 D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales
 Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
 Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Sojourners Online: sojo.net • @sojourners
 Get free email updates at sojo.net/email_subscription.

Spiritual Formation at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Where do we begin? Begin with the heart.
 - Julian of Norwich



*Community-grounded and
 spiritually rooted in Scripture,
 theology, and practice*

**Brew Like a Monk: Spiritual Practice
 as Fermentation**
 Sept. 17-20, 2017

**Discipleship: A New Testament
 View of the
 Inner and Outer Life of Faith**
 March 11-14, 2018

**Thomas Merton:
 The Journey to True Self**
 June 10-13, 2018

Office of Continuing Education
www.pts.edu/Sojo
ConEd@pts.edu
 412-924-1345



Connect Your Faith



with
Your Place

MENNONITE

CREATION



CARE
 NETWORK

Curriculum, companions & hope at mennocreationcare.org

BY JIM WALLIS

Forget Paris



FOR MANY OF US, how people treat the Earth goes far deeper than “politics.” Our relationship with God’s creation is, at heart, a theological matter.

The Paris climate accord is not perfect—it does not go far enough and it is not binding. Nevertheless, it was a giant step forward to have 195 countries commit to curbing the carbon emissions that are endangering the planet and the people who live on it, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. That step was very important, the result of decades of hard work and diligent diplomacy.

Therefore, Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw the United States from the agreement is a theological failure and an abdication of American leadership on perhaps

U.S. on an issue on which there is nearly unprecedented global consensus. The president’s America First ideology—especially as personified by his chief strategist, Stephen Bannon, and his EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt—outweighed the advice of every other major world leader, the heads of large corporations, the scientific community, religious leaders from every major tradition (including Pope Francis), and even members of Trump’s own family.

PRESIDENT TRUMP has decided that the U.S., the world’s second largest polluter (behind China), will play virtually no role in the global fight against climate change between now and 2021. The question for people of faith, conscience, and good will is: What can we do? Fortunately for our common home, there are many leaders and grassroots activists in every sector of society who are already providing answers to that question.

The political leaders of many states and cities have decided that they will abide by the Paris accord even if the federal government will not. Governors and mayors across the country—representing California, Hawaii, New York City, Pittsburgh, and many more—are formally committing their cities and states to reaching Paris agreement emissions targets.

After Trump announced that he represents “Pittsburgh, not Paris,” the Pittsburgh mayor said Trump does not represent the people of his city and that Pittsburgh will defy Trump’s decision. Large companies headquartered in the U.S. are doing the same. In fact, within days of Trump announcing the Paris withdrawal, 1,219 governors, mayors, businesses, investors, and colleges and universities promised that “we are

still in” the battle against climate change and still committed to the Paris accord global targets. That coalition will continue to grow to fill the vacuum left by the federal government.

Of course, religious leaders and people of faith from every tradition also have a critical role to play. For us, God’s instructions in scripture to care for creation take precedent over national borders or isolationist presidents.

Many religious leaders raised their voices, both before Trump announced the withdrawal decision and since then. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, as well as people of conscience who don’t ascribe to any faith—all of these recognize a responsibility on the part of human beings to care for, preserve, and steward the natural world and its resources in a responsible way.

AS CHRISTIANS, we need to make it a top priority to care for God’s creation and the abundance it is meant to provide for all of God’s children—especially the poorest and most vulnerable—now and in future generations. In some cases, that may mean denominations, congregations, and churches officially pledging to meet Paris targets with their own facilities and operations. It should also mean continued pressure on political leaders at the local, state, and federal levels to commit to the goals.

We need to continue to make the moral and spiritual case for global climate action and environmental justice. As God’s children, we are called to treat the Earth—our only home and a sacred gift from our Creator—with the love and respect it deserves. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Trump chose to isolate the U.S. on an issue on which there is nearly unprecedented global consensus.

the most important crisis facing the world today. Politically, it was enormously shallow, arrogant, and truth-less: three words that sadly characterize many of the bombastic statements and decisions the administration has made.

Trump’s slogan “America First” is also a theological problem, at least for religious communities that see God’s creation and children in a global way. Practically speaking, to think that one can protect the environment and ourselves with an “America first” strategy is simply not true. My teenage boys understand that climate change does not obey national boundaries, but the White House doesn’t seem to have figured that out.

By announcing that the United States will withdraw from the Paris accord, Trump chose to isolate the



Getty Images

By Jazmine T. Steele

A Moral Response to Cyberwar

Online attacks create a challenge for Christian ethicists.

IN MAY, a ransomware virus attacked computer systems in 150 countries and impacted more than 200,000 people. Experts say it was one of the largest cyberattacks ever. Is cyberwar the new frontier? And what do we make of the claim by Microsoft president Brad Smith that this virus piggybacked off a digital weapon developed by the United States? And then there's Russia's alleged interference with the 2016 U.S. presidential election. If there was an interception of the American people's right to the democratic process in order to advance Russia's own political agenda, what is a proper response?

John B. Sheldon, a professor of cybersecurity at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies in Alabama, defined cyberwar as "war conducted in and from computers and the networks connecting them, waged by states or their proxies against other states." Cyberwar is not to be confused, according to Sheldon, with online espionage, digital

terrorism, or other forms of cybercrime. Not every cyberattack is part of a cyberwar, nor should it be treated as such. Online weapons are cheap to make and easy to deploy; they are also primarily anonymous. And the most effective way to bring cybercriminals

Conversations on the ethics of cyberviolence need to keep pace with technology.

to justice and restore security might well be civilian-controlled internet policing, not state-led responses.

Ethicists and others have raised key questions at the heart of a moral response to cyberattacks. If the main purpose of a cyberattack is to destroy property, not people, Vanderbilt professor Larry May asked in his 2015 article, "The Nature of War and the Idea of 'Cyberwar,'" can it properly be described as war? Defining it as such may lead to a cyber arms race. And if it is a war, then who are the cyberdiplomats to negotiate a cyber

peace? Others have warned that the "uncontrollable" nature of some cyberweapons may indicate that they should be considered an "indiscriminate threat," which would place them in a unique ethical category.

Another issue in seeking a just response to cyberattacks relates to the anonymity of most perpetrators: It is often difficult, if not impossible, for a harmed party to determine who is responsible. "When you can't do attribution," digital strategist Simone Petrella told a recent panel of Christian ethicists and cyberexperts in Washington, D.C., "it is very difficult to figure out what your retribution is going to be."

What amount of harm from an online attack might trigger a conventional-war response? Bryan Hehir, a religion and politics professor at Harvard, has advocated for a large gap between a cyberattack and a conventional-weapons response. War is "at the edge of the moral universe," he said at the

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

Business and Editorial Address

Please send all business and editorial correspondence to Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002.

Subscription and Change of Address

SUBSCRIBERS: Visit sojo.net to subscribe to manage your subscription or print change of address on a card with old address label attached; send all subscription correspondence and address changes (except countries listed below) to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856, call 1-800-678-9691, or email us at sojourners@cambeywest.com (allow six weeks to process any address change).
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Subscription Rates

U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to *Sojourners* are available for \$19.95 (free to print subscribers) at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **All other foreign surface** (six to eight weeks delivery overseas): \$49.95 one year. **All other air service overseas** (one to two weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

Newsstand Circulation

Newsstand circulation through Disticor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@disticor.com.

Advertising

Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners*, please write to: Advertising, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002; advertising@sojo.net; or visit sojo.net.

Submissions

Submission guidelines can be found at: sojo.net/writers

Please direct poetry to the Poetry Editor (postal mail only, address below); and books, music, and reviews to the Review Editor by post or at reviews@sojo.net. No submissions will be returned.

Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.



All content copyright ©2017 Sojourners
408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002
Phone (202) 328-8842

D.C. event. While most panelists at the event used the traditional just war framework to assess cyberwar responses, a broader and deeper question might be: What are the things that make for cyberpeace?

Christians would argue that new forms of conflict provide an opportunity for innovative responses. "Global leaders could seek to harmonize domestic laws and expand criminal liability in a coordinated way for agreed-upon cyberthreats," writes international relations professor Maryann Cusimano Love in *Beyond Sovereignty*. "This approach relies on promoting cooperation in investigations and prosecutions." It builds

a stable, sustainable legal framework that contributes to peace over time.

Every day technology embeds deeper into our lives. With that codependent relationship comes risk, as we are reminded every time a cashier asks, "Do you have a chip?" Conversations on the ethics of cyberviolence need to keep pace with technology. If Christians don't advance ethical conversations and moral solutions, then responsibility for these decisions will be left in the hands of others. ■

Jazmine T. Steele is press coordinator at Sojourners.

By Heidi Schlumpf

Becoming a 'Seamless Garment'

Single-issue advocacy leads to inconsistency on life issues.

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS ago, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago called for a "consistent ethic of life"—a broad, underlying attitude of respect for human life and dignity that would apply to issues as diverse as abortion, peace, and the death penalty.

In a 1983 lecture that landed him—and the consistent ethic—on the front

fervor that results in hate crimes against Muslims already in our country? Is it pro-life to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with a program that would leave tens of millions without health insurance?

I've taken to using the hashtag #prolife sarcastically when sharing such news stories. How can people claim to be pro-life while

supporting policies under which people will literally lose their lives?

In the 1980s, Bernardin and others pointed out the

inconsistency of demonstrating at an anti-abortion march one weekend and advocating for the execution of a death-row inmate the next. It was this inclusion of capital punishment, nuclear weapons, and other social issues that caused conservative Catholics to criticize the so-called "seamless garment of life" approach.

(The "seamless garment" phrase, a reference to Jesus' robe that his executioners did not tear apart, was first used to describe a holistic reverence for life by Catholic pacifist Eileen Egan in 1973. Bernardin would go on to popularize the phrase.)

Critics claim this approach made all issues morally equivalent—an inaccurate oversimplification and distortion of the consistent ethic, which maintains distinctions between issues. Some conservative Catholics eventually adopted a more

Some evangelicals are broadening their definition of pro-life.

page of *The New York Times*, Bernardin drew connections between nuclear arms and abortion: "The principle which structures both cases, war and abortion, needs to be upheld in both places. It cannot be successfully sustained on one count and simultaneously eroded in a similar situation," he said.

If only we had listened.

Instead, single-issue voting has become so persistent that most Catholics apparently were able to justify a vote for the likes of Donald Trump as "pro-life," based solely on his alleged opposition to legalized abortion—a position he himself has inconsistently held. Is it pro-life to drastically cut social programs that poor folks need to survive, in favor of astronomical increases in military spending? Is it pro-life to ban Syrian refugees, while whipping up anti-Islam

From the Archives

August-September 1974

The Feminist Movement

When we consider the inferior status of women in Palestine in the first century ... Jesus' attitude toward women is striking. Jesus revealed himself *first* to women after his resurrection. The disciples ... thought the women were just dreaming. Paul does not include the women in his list of witnesses to the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5-7). But the fact still remains: Jesus dared to appear first to women.

The incident of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-30) has radical implications also. Here Jesus blatantly broke three customs: He, a man, talked to a woman in public. He, a Jew, spoke to a Samaritan. Finally, he instructed a woman in religion—a topic reserved only for men. When the disciples saw Jesus talking to this woman they were disturbed, but Jesus ignored them.

Even Paul's words and actions must have been shocking to his first-century friends. Despite his injunction at one point that women should be silent in the church, he freely recognized women as leaders at other points. In Philippians 4:2 he commended Euodia and Syntyche and called them "fellow workers." In 1 Corinthians he assumed women were prophesying and participating actively in worship. In Romans 16:7 he saluted Junia, a woman, as an apostle ... In Romans 16:1 he called Phoebe a deacon and, according to the best translation, he said, "she was designated as a ruler over many by me." ■

Lucille Sider Dayton was assistant director of the Urban Life Center in Chicago when this article appeared.



expansive "womb-to-tomb" agenda, adding euthanasia, pornography, and embryonic-stem-cell research, while still maintaining that Catholics may have to prioritize one issue over others at the ballot box.

Popes, including traditionalist ones, have supported the consistent ethic. John Paul II's 1995 encyclical "The Gospel of Life" makes clear that "[w]here life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good." This is not new; it is part of Catholic social teaching.

But Catholics haven't been the only Christians broadening their definition of pro-life. Some "new evangelicals" from emergent churches or the evangelical left have come to make connections between issues such as global warming, poverty, and abortion. Although a large majority of

younger evangelicals still oppose legal abortion in all or most cases, many are taking a less political approach that involves providing financial, medical, and emotional support for pregnant women, rather than rallying outside abortion clinics.

Yet, despite this progress, inconsistency continues. In fact, the current archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Blase Cupich, recently wrote that today it is not only the issues, but also the people—"isolated by differences of opinion or politics, race or social class"—that are in silos.

Once we are able to connect with one another, once Christians can *become* the seamless garment—only then will we be able to respond consistently to the urgent life issues in our world. ■

Heidi Schlumpf is an associate professor of communication at Aurora University outside Chicago and the author of Elizabeth Johnson: Questing for God.

By Donald W. Shriver Jr.

Addicted to Imprisonment

There's no justice in "recommended" sentencing guidelines.

TWO WHITE TEENAGERS were recently convicted of spraying racist graffiti on a historic black school in northern Virginia. Their somewhat unusual sentence: Read from a list of 35 books, one a month for a year, and submit a report on all 12 to their parole officers. The booklist included *Cry the Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou, *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, and other classics.

The remarkable feature of this sentence was how it clashed conceptually with the customary default question that suffuses our judicial system: How long a prison sentence does the crime deserve?

A strange mathematics is at work in our criminal justice system: For every crime, a matching time in prison. Translating the crime of racist graffiti into reading books that might reform the *minds* of two teenagers makes a certain rational match with the crime. Putting them in prison for five years is no match at all.

In the recent era of mandated sentences

for drug possession, judges themselves have sometimes protested the effects of such law. For example, in 2002, in Utah, 22-year-old Weldon Angelos was sentenced to 55 years in prison for trying to sell a half pound of marijuana. The sentencing judge, Paul Cassell, a George W. Bush appointee, called the mandated sentence "unjust, cruel, and even irrational." Twelve years into that sentence, another federal judge reduced the sentence and released Angelos.

The foundation of many of these draconian punishments is the set of guidelines from the U.S. Sentencing Commission unveiled in 1987 (echoed in state-level systems in nearly half the states). The federal document, with its "sentencing table," is a marvel of lawyerly specification of alleged fits between crimes and punishments. The recommended sentences range from six months to capital punishment.

This chart, while not mandatory, is now followed by many federal judges since it has the endorsement of Congress. But there is something narrow, deceptive, and

potentially cruel in all this quasi-mathematical calculation of justice, beginning with our default assumption of prison as society's response to crime. So pervasive and typical is this resort to imprisonment that we might conclude that our criminal justice system itself is addicted to imprisonment.

And the addiction isn't cheap. While government entities spend an estimated \$80 billion per year to incarcerate 2.2 million people, the true cost, according to a 2016 study at Washington University, exceeds \$1 trillion, half of that borne by the families of those incarcerated.

In our religious institutions, discussion of the moral issues of crime and punishment are often very superficial. I can hardly count the times in church discussions when

The concept of punishment fitting the crime has lost its meaning.

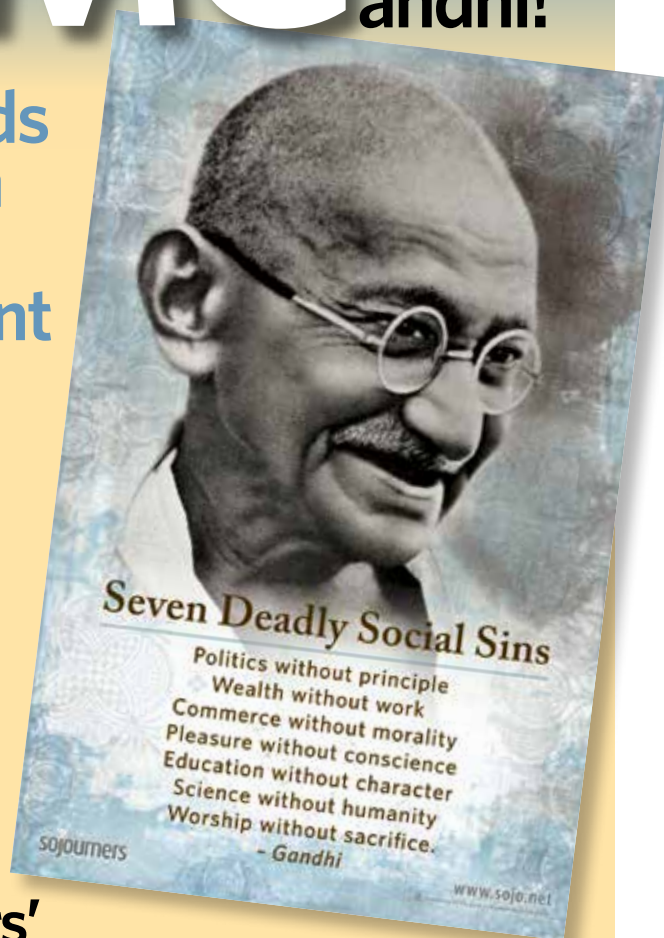
someone quotes Exodus 23:24—"eye for eye, tooth for tooth"—as though this formula is the heart of the Hebrew Bible's message about social response to human misbehavior. Few seem aware of the following verse that supports the idea of restorative justice. Exodus 22 uses terms such as "restitution" as responses to lawbreaking in common with norms of restorative justice. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is full of teachings that ask believers to imitate a justice of God that is suffused with mercy and forgiveness, a belief as basic to the prophets of Israel as to the teachings of Jesus.

Supreme Court Justice David Souter decried mandates that have sent people convicted of minor crimes to prison for decades, saying if these sentences are "not grossly disproportionate, the principle of fitting punishment to crime has no meaning." One has to wonder if the principle itself has lost its meaning over centuries of its dominance in our criminal justice systems. ■

Donald W. Shriver Jr. is president emeritus of Union Theological Seminary and author of An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics. A version of this essay ran on BillMoyers.com.

OMG andhi!

His words
are even
more
important
today.



Sojourners'
Gandhi Poster

FREE with a new
subscription
to *Sojourners*
magazine.

Sojourners' Seven Deadly Social Sins poster continues to be in demand year after year. Get yours FREE by subscribing to *Sojourners* magazine today!

Get a year of the award-winning *Sojourners* magazine (11 issues for \$39.95) and we'll send you a poster featuring Gandhi's provocative list of seven deadly social sins. This beautiful new edition of one of Sojourners' classic posters is printed with soy ink on 100% recycled paper and is sure to spark conversation.

Call 1-800-678-9691 to place your paid order; mention code S1708GAND and ask for the free Gandhi poster.

Call today and get your free Seven Deadly Social Sins poster.

Offer available for phone orders only.

AUDIO



Now Listen to This

Karl Barth famously advised doing theology with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. In *Meanwhile on the God Beat*, a new podcast from Sojourners, we offer a unique perspective on how issues of faith and religion intersect with the latest headlines. In recent episodes, Sojourners editors take listeners to a rally for immigration justice, explain why pastors are getting involved in a trial for a 14-year-old girl accused of killing her father, and talk with experts about the challenges of reporting on religion when it collides with controversial topics such as LGBTQ issues and politics. Listen and subscribe at iTunes or visit sojo.net/godbeat.

QUOTED

“The exclusively white, male pastoral staff would make insensitive jokes about the group: ‘How’s the depression group going? They still sad?’”

—Jo L. Kretzler
on the church and mental illness
sojo.net/stigma

OPINION



Beyond Dr. King

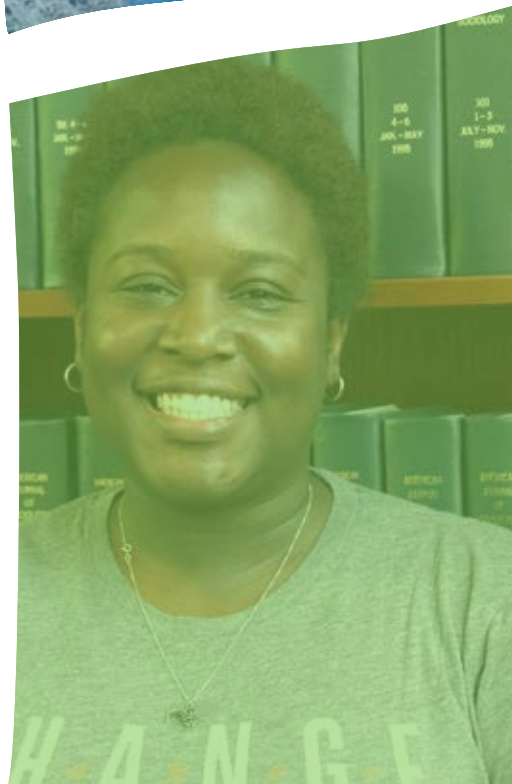
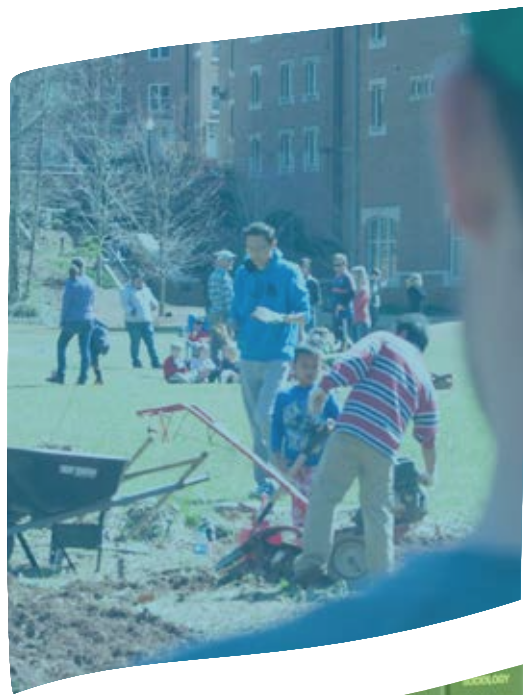
The vast majority of U.S. seminaries are still ill-equipped to help black church leaders save dying communities,” writes Richard N. Williams in “The Mis-Education of the Negro Seminarian.”

“While there is no disputing the valuable contributions of Origen, Tertullian, Aquinas, and Luther, these men cannot offer the practical ministerial tools to combat any number of the numerous realities plaguing the ‘hood,” writes Williams, a student at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology. “There is a need to highlight the work of pastor-theologian-activists other than Martin Luther King Jr. Courses on Adam Clayton Powell (Sr. and Jr.), Gardner C. Taylor, and Samuel Proctor, among countless others who have successfully built churches and communities through their efforts, would provide more adequate contextual knowledge respective to the call of black seminarians.”

Williams also describes “white seminaries’ lack of cultural sensitivity toward students’ daily trauma living as black men and women in the United States.”

“My classmates and I walked into Candler in the days and weeks after the deaths of Terence Crutcher, Korryn Gaines, and Philando Castile and were met with no sympathy. We were on campus as the news broke of a mistrial in the Walter Scott shooting and received no empathy from the administration. Other black seminarian friends of mine in white-led seminaries grabbed each other and prayed on their own when they learned that no one would answer for the death of Freddie Gray, as there was no intentional space created for lament purposes.”

Read more at sojo.net/miseducation.



www.CTSnet.edu



Governors Island,
across from Manhattan

N.Y. Daily News

How Sweet the City Can Be

I HAD A REAL New York City sojourn on a recent weekend, one that reminded this longtime country dweller how sweet the city can be.

It began on Friday night at the IFC Center downtown, watching a premiere screening of the pilot of the new HBO series *The Deuce*, which is set on 42nd Street in 1971. Though I didn't get to New York until the early '80s, the street scenes in the show were familiar—the grit and violence and general decay lingered at least through the crack years of the mid-1980s; when I left New York,

where the city has strung hammocks for you to rest, and a pop-up miniature golf course, and dozens of small art exhibits, concert stages, and grills. There's even a Compost Learning Center, in case you want to, well, learn about compost.

What Governors Island reminds us is how much city life has improved in the last few decades. There are places like it in every city I know—soccer fields and carousels and farmers markets. What there isn't, any more, is a way for poor people to enjoy that urban life. In *The Deuce*, one of the characters lives for a while in a Times Square residential hotel. In those days, cities were places where the marginal could make a life of sorts along the ... margins.

But in the decade that followed, those single-room-occupancy hotels started turning into condominiums (or actual hotels, the kind that now charge German tourists \$300 a night for a little room). It was suddenly much harder to be a lost soul. That produced the first real tide of homelessness in the city—when I lived there in the '80s, and helped start a homeless shelter in the basement of my church, homelessness was still novel, an emergency, something we imagined might go away.

It never did, because the city just kept getting richer and more expensive, and in the

process more and more exclusive. You'd have to be a highly successful loser now to stand a chance there. In an odd and hopeless way, the gritty New York of the 1970s and 1980s offered more chances to the poor and marginal than the shiny happy place that's built up in the years since. This is not a defense of that gritty place—it's just an observation.

And a reminder that one of the real challenges of this millennium is to build urban areas in ways that make it possible for more people, of all types, to enjoy their pleasures. Alex Steffen, a well-grounded short-term futurist, has been using his blog to build out a series of ideas about "the heroic future," one where, among other things, we change the zoning laws in our city to encourage more building, so that housing becomes less expensive instead of more, and urban cores even more dense and lively. There's NIMBY opposition, always, from people who like the current balance of power. But a future that's environmentally sound, and fundamentally just, demands that we keep on building great urban areas. ■

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



A real challenge is to build urban areas in ways that people of all types can enjoy their pleasures.

42nd Street remained a canyon of porn theaters and massage parlors. (*The Deuce*, by the way, is brilliant—Maggie Gyllenhaal is unforgettable as the complicated lead.)

But the next morning, bright and early, my wife and I were on the ferry to Governors Island, the city's newest amenity. Long a military base, its barracks and forts were turned into a park a few years ago, and now—for \$2—you can head across a narrow stretch of the harbor on a boat and soon you're in a completely different world: There are, of course, food trucks (but no cars), and a grove



ENCOUNTERING GOD

The Center for Lifelong Learning

For church professionals and lay people, the Center for Lifelong Learning at Columbia provides non-degree courses and programs—opportunities to learn with and from others for faithful discipleship—in Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Direction, Leadership and certificate programs.

CULTIVATING LEADERS

Master's Degree Programs

With our MDiv and 3 other master's level programs, our world-class faculty continues our legacy of leadership formation, to move forward in timely and fresh directions.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Doctoral Degree Programs

Our DMin and DEdMin programs equip ministry practitioners to lead local communities across diverse theological traditions and contexts, offering unique opportunities for advanced study, such as our new Asian North American Ministry and Theology concentration.

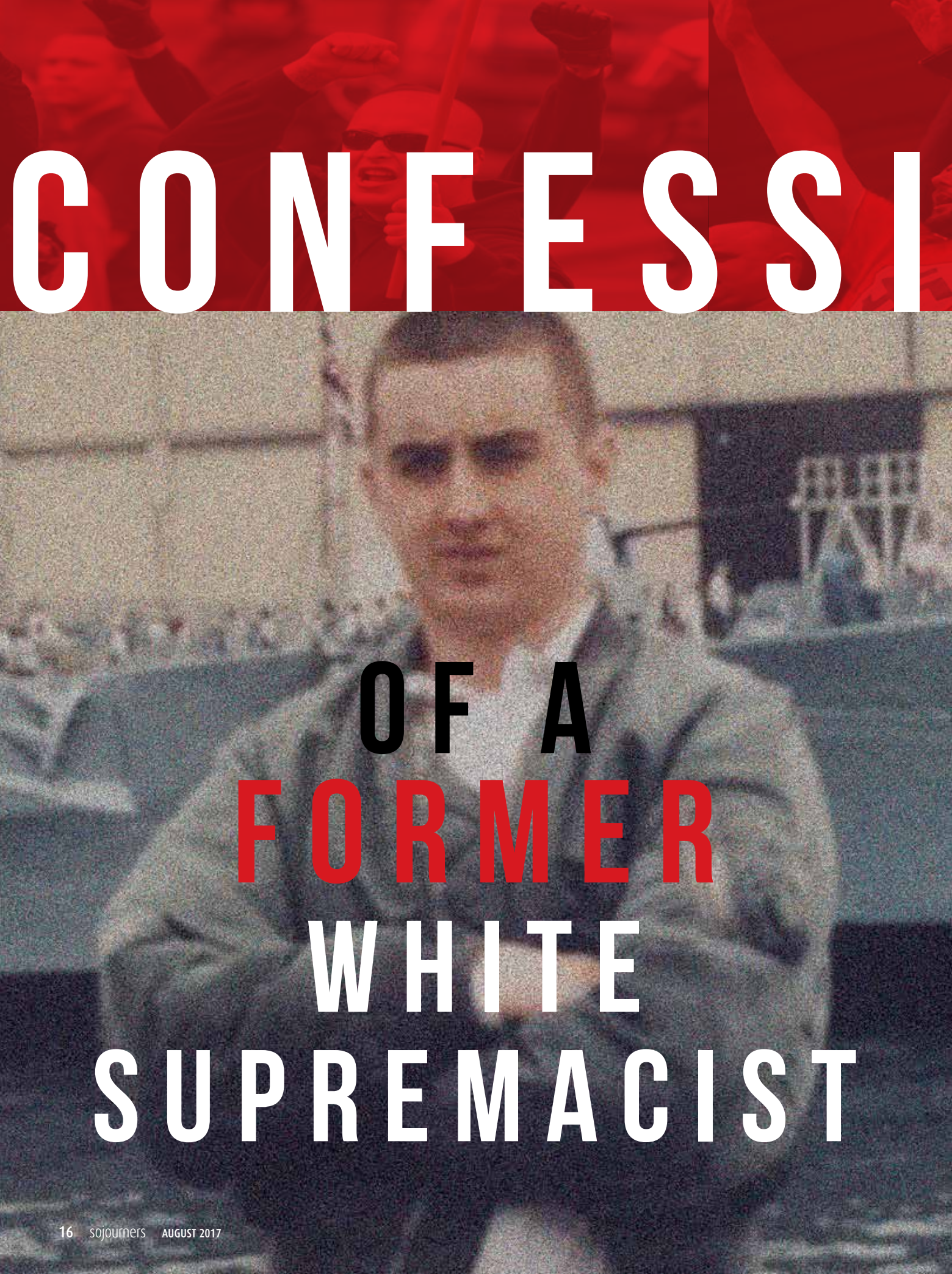
...FOR GOD'S CHANGING WORLD

Columbia Theological Seminary exists to educate and nurture faithful, imaginative, and effective leaders for the sake of the Church and the world. In carrying out our mission, we seek to be faithful to the gospel, and to become a living expression of the Body of Christ in the world.



COLUMBIA
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

www.CTSnet.edu



CONFESSI

**OF A
FORMER
WHITE
SUPREMACIST**

ONS



A conversation with a former neo-Nazi who's learned that there's life after hate.

by JASON BYASSEE

TONY McALEER TELLS a story about one of the other founders of Life After Hate, a nonprofit dedicated to helping people leave neo-Nazi and other extremist groups. McAleer's colleague was being served at McDonald's by an elderly African-American woman who saw the swastika tattooed on his hand. She looked at him, and said, "Oh honey, you're so much better than that."

That seed germinated for years until the man left white nationalism and dedicated himself to helping others leave.

"The hardest thing in the world is to have compassion for those who have no compassion," McAleer told *Sojourners* in an interview in his native Vancouver, British Columbia. "But those are the people who need it the most." And given the number of such people attracted to such ideas in the wake of a certain presidential election, we all need pointers in how to deter folks from the fringes of what is now called the alt-right and what was once called neo-Nazism.

McAleer was for years a leading communicator of neo-Nazi ideas via television appearances and web design: "My nickname

Tony McAleer, above right, co-founder of Life After Hate. At left, McAleer as a young neo-Nazi in Canada.

was Goebbels," he said. That's hard to imagine now. McAleer speaks with confidence, but not about the evils of immigration or the glories of the white race. Rather, he works to deconstruct

the psychology of hatred, which he once knew intimately from the inside. Now he seeks to help free others from it.

His time as a white nationalist was not without real, material harm. In 1998 a Sikh man named Nirmal Singh Gill was stomped to death in the parking lot of a *gurdwara*, a Sikh place of worship, in Surrey, B.C. McAleer was not involved, directly. In another sense, "I can't say I contributed zero percent to that." He had recruited people into white nationalism who subsequently recruited the murderers. And this was no accident. "I could say I only contributed ideas. But the end result of those ideas, unchecked, is murder," he said. There has been some subsequent reconciliation. McAleer has met with Gill's son-in-law, who he said has offered to translate McAleer's forthcoming book into Punjabi.

How do we transform more angry young white men from murderer to reconciliation?

Out of the shadows

In 2016, the number of hate groups in the U.S. increased for a second year in a row, including a tripling of the number of anti-Muslim groups, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. These groups received a boost from Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Suddenly, groups that mainstream Americans might have thought fringe were whispering in the president's ear.

McAleer used to belong to such groups when they were skinheads in leather jackets, before they grew their hair out, put on ties, and launched websites with seemingly innocuous names. How did we get in this fix, and how do we get out of it?

McAleer got out with his communications skills. He had designed a website for a white nationalist recording label in exchange for a share of the profits, and he noticed the income bump. A friend joked what an advantage he would have in the marketplace outside of white extremism. "You've been trying to sell Nazism and Adolf Hitler. But people actually *want* life insurance." McAleer became a successful financial planner.

But most people can't leave so easily. Thus groups such as Life After Hate have received media and government attention, including an Obama administration Department of Homeland Security grant, which now may never arrive. "Law enforcement recognizes it can't arrest its way out of this problem," McAleer said.

Contrary to some storylines from Washington, McAleer said, "This is not only 'radical Islamic terror.'" He points to violence

Photos courtesy of Life After Hate



by white extremists from Oklahoma City to recent murders in Kansas and New York. As media is often loathe to point out, 9/11 was not the beginning of the country's experience with terror—African Americans have faced the multiheaded beast of slavery, lynching, and Jim Crow for centuries.

Life After Hate is unlikely to dislodge someone who is fully and ideologically committed to a hate group. But many people are wobblers in their commitment—and these it can reach, through social media, YouTube videos (one of which won an Emmy), personal contact, and

McAleer's anger rotted into neo-Nazism—a process he sees being echoed in Western societies.

more. The group also conducts research on who is susceptible to extremism and has found that the key factors are disconnection and childhood trauma.

Journey to the extremes

Unlike some who join extremist groups, McAleer was an upper-middle-class kid, with a physician father who provided for his family well on the tony west side of Vancouver. But his father was also absent, physically and emotionally. As an 11-year-old, McAleer walked in on his father with another woman. "I'm not the first kid to experience adultery," he said. "And it doesn't excuse my later actions."

McAleer attended an all-boys Catholic school, where he was bullied. "Again, not a unique story," he said. He sidled up to and joined the bullies. "It's like being a pufferfish—you make yourself look big." He became as violent as any of the others and found respect, of a sort. "If I had been captain of the football team, I could have had all the attention, acceptance, and significance of not being powerless or unlovable. But I wasn't a jock."

Identity is a complex matter—occasionally harmless, often life-giving, sometimes death-dealing. Civil rights activist John Perkins said the way to minister to a gang member isn't to tell them to give up on gang life—it's to provide a new gang.

McAleer once figured he'd be dead in a coming race war before he was 30. "And I was okay

with that," he said. Is there any organization—some new gang—that can compete with that sort of zeal for martyrdom?

American History Fight Club

British Columbia would seem an unlikely petri dish for white nationalist hate. In this way, it's instructive for Americans in the wake of the Trump election. B.C. prides itself on being the most liberal and inclusive province of a quite liberal and inclusive nation (naturally, such descriptions throw shade south of the 49th parallel).

"I guess you could say I had oppositional disorder," McAleer said of reacting against what he considered British Columbia "PC" tolerance. His father experienced the blitz firsthand as a child in England, but McAleer had a poster of Hitler in his room. As others disapproved, he doubled down. "What's the opposite of love? I'd rather have had bad attention from my dad than none at all."

McAleer's anger and rage rotted into neo-Nazism—a process he sees being echoed in Western societies writ large: "Unresolved anger always expresses itself in violence."

McAleer claims to have predicted Trump's ascension a year before the election. He kept hearing people say, "Trump says what I think but am afraid to say." Brexit led the way, of course. And in both cases folks in major international financial centers such as London, New York, and Los Angeles couldn't understand what was happening in the country around them, let alone respond.

But the disconnection a kid on Canada's West Coast once felt is now multiplied into the tens of millions. "Populism is the check-engine light in the car. You don't like that it turns on, but you have to deal with it," he said.

In both the U.K. and the U.S., the Left insisted everything was fine; only xenophobes could think otherwise, and anyway their proposed policies of slightly more government largesse was better than their opponents' promises to smash stuff. The smashers, of course, won. "Historians," McAleer said, "will rank the 'basket of deplorables' comment with 'let them eat cake.'"

Gen X white males like McAleer resonated with films such as *Fight Club* and *American History X* in a reaction against bourgeois upbringings that asked nothing other than continually improving as consumers. Death-dealing as it is, neo-Nazism has the odd virtue of asking people to stand out from their peers in the name of something unpopular. Something else—something much healthier and humanizing—also asks for difficult personal commitment: having a child. "It's safe to love a child," McAleer said. "They're not capable of shame, ridicule, or rejection. Until they're teenagers."

Baby steps

At age 23, McAleer was a single father of two children. "And back in the '90s, you got a lot of kudos for that," he laughed. What you don't get is a paycheck, and fascist proclivities do tend to limit employment opportunities. "For the first time in my life, I was making decisions for someone other than myself." He realized that others in the extremist groups didn't care if he was dead at 30. But his children needed him. "I rationalized that to do something for the white race, I should ensure that these children survive." Baby steps.

Participants join hands at a Life After Hate conference. At far right, the Life After Hate team, all former far-right extremists.



For McAleer the activist, disengagement from hate groups is the first stage. Folks can leave extremist movements with their ideologies relatively intact. There is time later to take those on. But beginning with a critique of ideas won't usually deradicalize anyone. What might?

"It's incredibly powerful to receive compassion from someone you've dehumanized," he said, telling the story of the McDonald's employee. At a friend's urging, McAleer himself went to a counselor for the first time in his life. As he laid out his neo-Nazi past, the therapist smiled. "What?" McAleer asked. "You don't know?" the therapist responded. "I was born Jewish."

McAleer figures that he and his therapist, Dov Baron, spent some 1,000 hours together in therapy, events, and workshops—they both speak on the leadership circuit. It took this relationship with a Jewish therapist for a former skinhead to learn he was loveable, to bring the healing that is a necessary step beyond disengagement.

Baron encouraged McAleer to tell others about his experiences. He wasn't ready. Who wants to hear that their financial adviser is a former neo-Nazi? Finally, by 2012, he was ready. "I only lost one client," he said. "They were Jewish. I should have gone and told them in person before I went public, but I was ashamed. I learned something about vulnerability." Others have stayed and his business has prospered—helping to fund the work of Life After Hate.

Something more beautiful

So, he is asked, how do we apply your experiences society-wide? Not everyone gets 1,000 hours with a Jewish therapist. "But the Big Mac only cost \$1.69!" he insists—small, everyday gestures matter. He encounters that objection a lot—after a Life After Hate workshop, one angry questioner said, "We need legislation, not compassion!" There is a place for both, but McAleer prefers to talk about "internal legislation." He analogizes by talking about the way culture has changed regarding food: Restaurants now have healthy options; grocery chains make a killing off organic kale—offering something more beautiful is more effective, eventually, than simply criminalizing the ugly.

McAleer tells the story of Life After Hate's work with a Canadian veteran of the war in Afghanistan who was teetering toward anti-Islam extremism. McAleer took him to meet the imam at the community's local Islamic center, to break down stereotypes and receive compassion from someone the vet was in danger of dehumanizing.

He speaks of Life After Hate's birth at a Summit Against Violent Extremism sponsored by Google Ideas in Dublin in 2011. Former extremists gathered from all over the world: FARC guerillas and government muscle, radical Israeli settlers and Mujahideen, IRA and Ulster Volunteer Corps. One pair, from Nigeria, featured a formerly radical imam and a Catholic priest whose hand the imam had cut off.

It is crucial for social healing to gather both victims and victimizers: "You can't have this conversation without the voices" of those mistreated, McAleer said. He tells of an Ulster Orangeman meeting a woman who lost her leg to a bomb. He asked where and when it happened. She told him. He quickly said, "That wasn't my unit,"

and walked away. But then he stopped. Turned around. And then, McAleer relates, he walked back over to the woman, saying, "I have to take accountability for this." It's human nature not to want to accept healthy shame, McAleer said.

Life Without Hate refounded itself based on the Dublin conference. It had previously been a website featuring stories of those unlearning hate. Its new mission is "to inspire individuals and communities to a place of compassion and forgiveness for themselves and for all people."

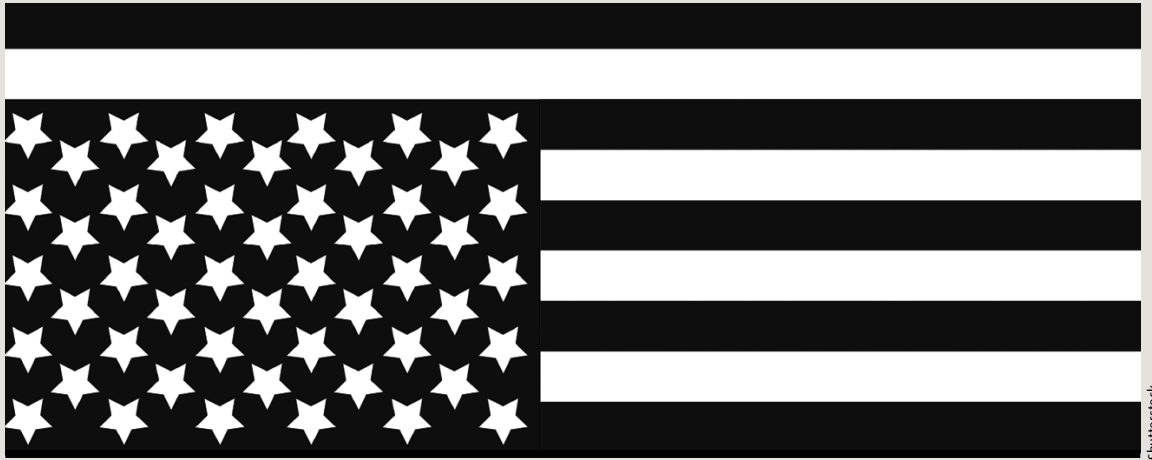
McAleer is not partisanly inclined along U.S. lines ("I had the luxury of voting for Trudeau"). But he does worry about U.S. politics—when America sneezes, the world catches cold, as the old saying goes. In the public at large, McAleer sees a deeper intertwining of identity and ideology. He's not surprised to see that in extremists—their views *are* who they are, so they existentially cannot discuss them with someone not in the group. But now the intertwining of ideology and identity is found not just on the fringes. "In a healthy society, there's dialogue," McAleer said, "and people can get their views out, and there's a healthy release of that steam." Repress it, and it erupts.

I ask if that's what Life Without Hate is trying to do—offer a healthy release of steam. McAleer shakes his head at the mechanical image. "We try to help people reconnect with their humanity"—first their own unresolved pain and sense of being unlovable, then that of others whom they've mistreated, whose pre-emptive offer of grace often sets the whole process going.

Because we're all so much better than this. ■

"We try to help people reconnect with their humanity."

Jason Byassee holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia.



Shutterstock

Distress Signal

The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.

—U.S. Flag Code

IT SEEMS RATHER odd that a normal part of my catching-up-at-the-end-of-the-day conversation with my partner is discussing the whiplash of political events. Leaks are not conversations about the sink. Notes are not to be turned into the teacher. Tapes are not our latest vintage find. They are all political subjects and part of the ever-evolv-

Facebook profile picture. I haven't changed it since December 2014.

It used to be a different angle of the photo you see at the end of my column—me wearing my signature red lipstick in beautiful, natural light. Something shifted in me that year as we met Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and Michael Brown in death and violence, and I changed my profile picture to a black and white depiction of the U.S. flag hanging upside down. I chose that image after a friend posted a similar image with the flag code explaining the symbolism, fully expecting to change it out for something more “me” after the holidays. And then there was Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, and so many more. The upside-down flag stayed.

I became a U.S. citizen in January 2010 after decades of wrestling with the idea of belonging and what it meant to be an American. I immigrated to the U.S. in 1971. I was 8 months old. In fact, my parents called me in early May this year to remind me it was the day we had arrived in the U.S. I grew up identifying myself as a Korean American, even though the American part was not official until seven years ago. My father begged me to apply for citizenship after 9/11 because he understood things were

shifting, but I waited. After Barack Obama won his first term as president, I realized that citizenship was a privilege and I wasn't taking advantage of it. Becoming an American citizen, even if it wasn't by birthright, meant I could vote.

I changed my profile picture because as an American who at some level has chosen allegiance and paid for the privilege, I wanted to show other Americans who know the power of symbolism, and Christians in particular, that I am utterly disgusted by a justice system that seems designed to arbitrarily define justice, and just as arbitrarily dispense it. I changed my profile picture because the flag is something we see daily—in front of fast food restaurants, at schools, and sometimes in our churches—but we rarely think about the code governing its display. I changed the picture because if your world doesn't feel like it has been or is turning upside-down, maybe you aren't watching carefully enough.

We are in a time of dire distress.

The lives of our black brothers and sisters remain in extreme danger. ■

Kathy Khang, co-author of More than Serving Tea, is a writer, speaker, and coffee-drinker in the north suburbs of Chicago.



If your world doesn't feel like it is turning upside-down, maybe you aren't watching carefully enough.

ing new normal. And just as spring was forcing its way into bloom, it was announced that Officer Betty Shelby of the Tulsa (Okla.) Police Dept. was found not guilty of first-degree manslaughter in the shooting death of unarmed Terence Crutcher.

The new normal snapped back into a familiar story of an unarmed black person expected to do everything “right” at the risk of simply appearing to be a threat. Some things never change.

Which made me think of my



A shared tomorrow

Today's financial decisions will impact our loved ones and communities into the future. How are you preparing for tomorrow?

We can help. Contact your Everence® representative about how you can integrate your decisions about money with your faith and values.

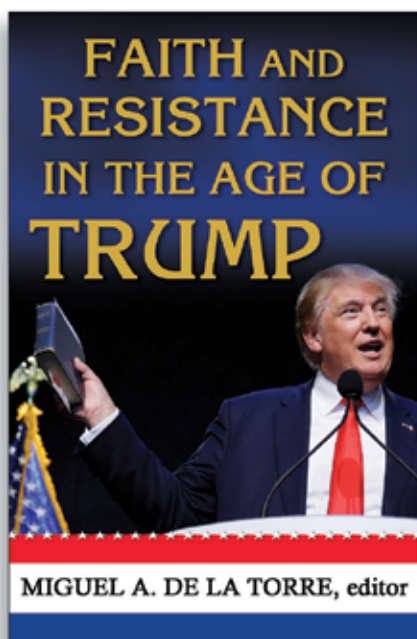
(800) 348-7468
everence.com



Banking | Investing | Retirement | Financial Planning | Insurance | Charitable Giving

Everence offers credit union services that are federally insured by NCUA. Investments and other products are not NCUA or otherwise federally insured, may involve loss of principal and have no credit union guarantee. All products are not available in all states.

“May this book serve as a nurturing, connecting, and maintaining resource. . . .” —from the Foreword by JIM WALLIS



Faith and Resistance in the Age of Trump

MIGUEL A. DE LA TORRE, Editor

Noted scholars, ministers, and activists — including, Sr. Simone Campbell, Kelly Brown Douglas, Rabbi Steven Greenberg, David Gushee, Jacqueline M. Hildalgo, George “Tink” Tinker — make a bold proclamation of why so many American faith communities are deeply concerned by the election of Donald Trump.

978-1-62698-247-5 272pp index pbk \$22.00

Pub Date 9/14—Available for Pre-order.

From your bookseller or direct

1-800-258-5838 M-F 8-4 ET

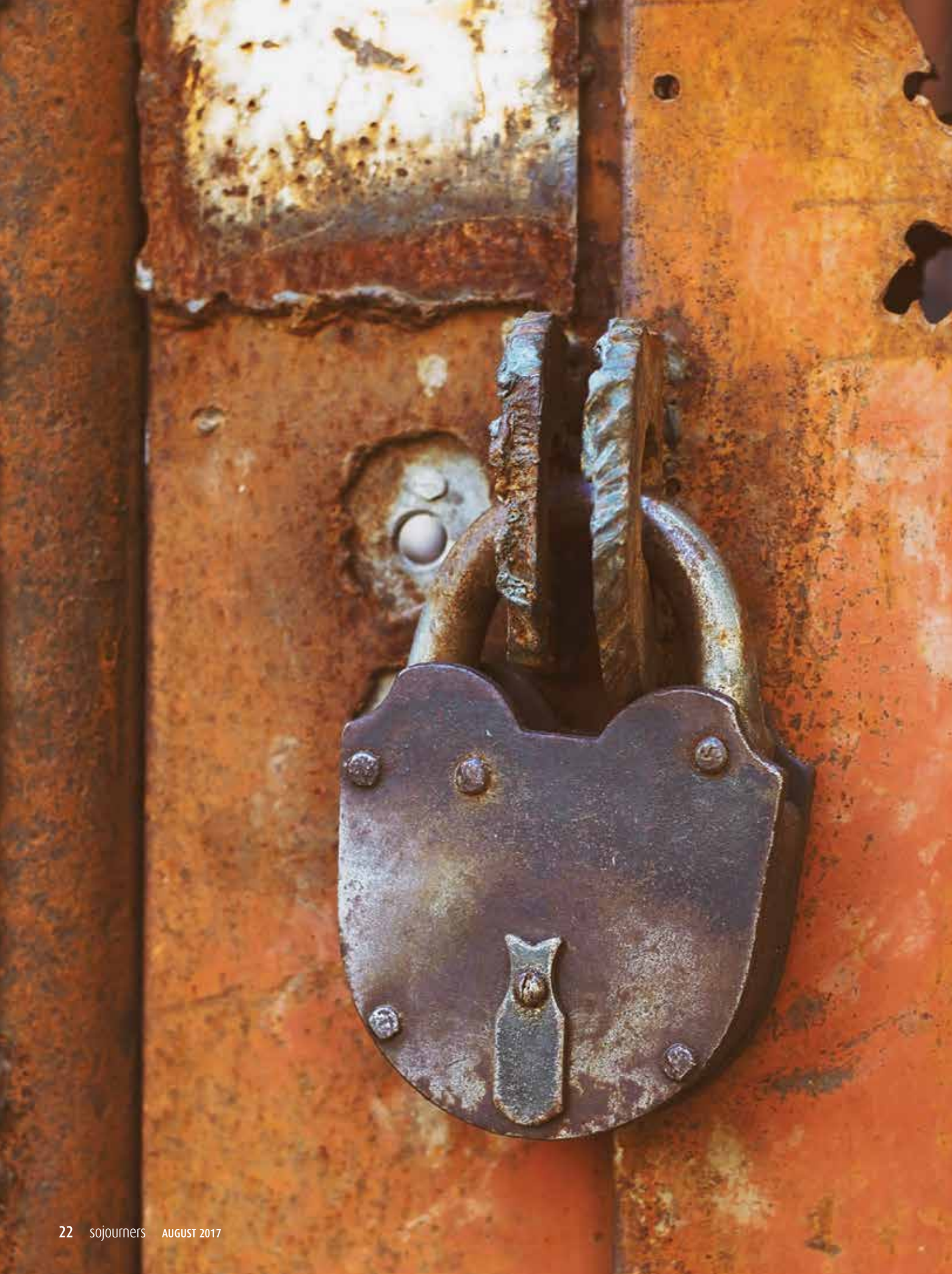
OrbisBooks.com



ORBIS BOOKS

Maryknoll, NY 10545

Follow us





Early Christians didn't just advocate for prison reform—they questioned the entire logic of retributive violence.

by **RYAN SCHELLENBERG**

Release to the Captives

In the second century, Jesus' followers were not a reputable bunch. Most people had probably never heard of Christians, but some knew the rumors: They worshipped a crucified criminal, ate flesh and blood, and obstinately refused to sacrifice to the gods. And they were notorious for hanging around prisons.

This is partly because many early Christians ended up in prison themselves. Jesus did. Peter did. Paul did. Ignatius of Antioch did.

But Christians were also known for showing up at prisons voluntarily. In one of the earliest surviving references to the Christian movement by an outsider, the second-century writer Lucian, who thought followers of Christ were laughably ignorant and naive, mocks them for the support they gave an imprisoned Christian leader named Peregrinus. Lucian describes widows and orphans loitering around the prison while their leaders bribe the jailers to get inside, bringing Peregrinus food and encouraging him with the scriptures. "It's incredible how quickly they respond in such situations," he remarks. "They get to work immediately, and spare nothing."

Shutterstock

Apparently, one of the first things observers noticed about Christians—and ridiculed them for—was their concern for the imprisoned. Ancient Christians saw care for prisoners as emblematic of the justice and mercy to which Jesus had called them. And so they showed up, sometimes in large numbers, to care for and encourage prisoners, bringing food, bribing their way inside, and advocating for humane treatment. Although initially they were focused on supporting fellow believers who were imprisoned because of their faith, they soon came to extend this compassion to all, regardless of the reason for their incarceration.

This legacy has never been more relevant. Despite modest declines over the past decade, the prison population in the United States is still five times what it was 40 years ago. In 2015, one of every 115 adults was behind bars—not including 30,000 additional people held in immigrant detention centers. No other state has ever utilized incarceration on such a scale.

And as best-selling books such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* explain, there are deep racial disparities in the American carceral system—with devastating consequences: According to a recent estimate, one of every three black men can expect to be incarcerated during his lifetime. As a result, one in every 15 African-American children has a parent in prison at any given time.

Christian and interfaith organizations are responding by advocating for prison alternatives and sentencing reform, by supporting ex-offenders as they re-enter their communities, and by building relationships within prisons that seek to restore wholeness and dignity. Whether they know it or not, they are building on a tradition that is as old as Christianity itself.

Burdens and bribes

The earliest evidence of this tradition is found in the New Testament. “Remember those who are in prison,” the author of Hebrews urged his readers, “as if you were in prison with them” (13:3). Imprisonment was common enough among early Christians that such empathy did not require a great leap of imagination (10:32–34).

But remembering those in prison was not just a matter of thoughts and prayers; it included material care and support, undertaken at considerable risk. One reason Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians was to thank them for sending Epaphroditus to care for his needs while in prison. Paul was grateful for the emotional and spiritual support Epaphroditus provided (2:29–30), but his support was also practical: Prisoners in the ancient world were given inadequate food, if any at all, and quite often died of starvation or disease while in custody. No wonder Paul described the Philippians’ gift as “a fragrant



Be suspicious of what goes by the name of justice.

offering” (4:18). It may have provided his first real meal in weeks.

By the late second century, some churches were taking up monthly benevolent offerings that were used, in part, to provide food for prisoners. This was not only a great gift to the prisoners themselves, but also an act of care for prisoners’ families, who otherwise would have borne the financial burden alone. As is the case today, many of the families affected by incarceration were already living on the brink of poverty. Without the support of the church, losing a breadwinner to prison would have left remaining family members with few options. As one ancient writer lamented, wives and sisters and daughters of prisoners were often forced to resort to begging or prostitution.

Church funds were even used to bribe jailers. Although modern Christians might find this practice morally problematic, ancient believers saw it as an important means of advocacy. Anyone who has been inside a U.S. prison knows the incarcerated can be victims of degrading and arbitrary violence at the hands of their keepers. Such cruelty was common in ancient prisons, and jailers were seldom held accountable. Using gifts to gain the guards’ favor was thus an important precaution. Do not neglect a condemned Christian, instructs a third-century church manual called the *Didascalia apostolorum*, but “from your labor and from the sweat of your brow send him food for his nourishment and payment for the soldiers guarding him, so that your blessed brother may be relieved, receive attention, and not be utterly afflicted.”

The story of the third-century martyr Perpetua shows what a difference such support could make. Arrested and imprisoned because of her newfound commitment to Christ, Perpetua was terrified: “I had never before been in such a dark hole,” her memoir recounts. “With the crowd the heat was stifling; then there was the extortion of the soldiers.” Worst of all, though, was a deprivation that remains an agonizing one for many incarcerated women today—she was separated from her child. “To crown all,” she writes, “I was tortured with worry for my baby.” Imagine her relief, then, when two local deacons bribed the guards. Perpetua was relocated to a less dismal part of the prison, allowed to see her family, and, most important, was able to nurse her child.

‘Let us have mercy’

Clearly, early Christians were devoted to helping those who were imprisoned for their faith. But they did not reserve their compassion only for other believers. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded his disciples that God makes rain to fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike (Matthew 5:45). At their best, the early Christians

approached care for prisoners in the same way. Their own experiences of incarceration taught them to view the imprisoned not with hostility or contempt, as most of their neighbors did, but with sympathy, whatever the reason for their imprisonment. “Are those in prison murderers?” asked fourth- and fifth-century bishop John Chrysostom. “Well, let us not grow weary in doing what is right. Are they grave-robbers and adulterers? Let us have mercy, if not on their wrongdoing, then on their misfortune.”

One particularly striking story comes from fourth-century Egypt. As a young man, Pachomius was among a group of recruits conscripted into the army of Constantine the Great and imprisoned to prevent them from deserting. That evening, a group of believers learned of the young men’s fate and turned up at the prison to provide food, drink, and comfort. Pachomius was floored. He knew nothing of Christians and asked who these kind folks were. They are Christians, he was told, people who are merciful to everyone, even to strangers.

Some Christians did see prison as an appropriate punishment, especially once the church had enough clout that Christian leaders could use incarceration to threaten and punish their opponents. But many believers were convinced that imprisonment was by its very nature oppressive, even when employed in response to serious criminal behavior. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew*, the apostle Andrew once refused to heal a prominent Philippian man’s son until the man had released two criminals that he had locked up in prison. There is no indication that these prisoners were Christians, and they certainly were not innocent. They had committed, we are told, “an unspeakable crime.” Still, Andrew was insistent: “How can you ask help for your son while you keep these men bound?” Although this story is likely fictional, still it attests to the strong conviction of many Christians that prison was fundamentally unjust, a means by which the rich and powerful oppressed the weak. Indeed, one early church manual warns bishops not to accept donations from rich persons who oppress the poor, mistreat their slaves, or have people locked up in prison.

As the church gained institutional power in the fourth century, it also began to take on a more systematic role as an advocate for prisoners. We can glimpse the scope of its work by paying attention to the kinds of advocacy that the Roman authorities outlawed. The Emperor Theodosius, himself a Christian, warned church leaders and monks to stop trying to whisk away prisoners who were being transferred under escort. He tried to regulate the practice of granting asylum to those fleeing arrest. He forbade clergy from interceding on



The early Christian witness invites us to something more radical than reduced sentences.

Ryan Schellenberg
is assistant professor
of New Testament
at Methodist
Theological School
in Ohio.

behalf of prisoners who had confessed or already been convicted—that is, from interceding on behalf of the guilty. And he tried to stop Christians from winning the freedom of prisoners by paying the debts for which they had been imprisoned. The only explanation for the existence of any of these laws is widespread and effective action by Christians on behalf of the imprisoned—even those who, in the eyes of the law, deserved their chains.

‘Vengeance is mine, says the Lord’

What motivated this persistent, even subversive compassion for prisoners? One answer is that ancient Christians took seriously the words of Jesus. Third-, fourth-, and fifth-century preachers reflected often on Jesus’ assertion, recorded in Matthew 25, that when his followers attend to the needs of those in prison, they are in fact caring for Jesus himself. When early Christians looked at prisoners, they saw not only convicts, but Christ.

Christians also distrusted the retributive logic that, in the eyes of others, made prison seem reasonable and even just. While explaining why Christians should not serve as soldiers, Tertullian, the early Christian apologist from Carthage, expressed horror at the possibility that they might be assigned to work as jailors: “Shall he apply the chain, and the prison, and the torture, and the punishment, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs?” If, as Paul commanded, believers are not to avenge themselves (Romans 12:19), how could they take vengeance on behalf of others by serving as prison guards? Clearly, Tertullian saw no essential difference between the retributive “justice” of the state and other forms of vengeance. Christians were not to participate in either.

Recently there have been signs of hope that the prison epidemic in the United States is beginning to wane. After decades of dramatic increase, the number of people held in jail or prison has declined slightly over the past few years. At the federal level, there has been bipartisan interest in sentencing reform, as well as in finding alternatives to prison for those convicted of non-violent drug-related offenses.

These are worthy efforts, and merit our full support. But the early Christian witness invites us to something more radical than reduced sentences for the least threatening offenders. It summons us to what Jesus called the love of enemies—the persistent refusal to ignore the humanity even of those society hates most and fears most. It reminds us to be suspicious of what goes by the name justice. And it invites us to stand resolutely alongside the imprisoned and their families. That, after all, is where Jesus is. ■



Shutterstock

Total Eclipse (of the Soul)

THIS WON'T HAPPEN again until 2045. On Aug. 21, the thumb of God (with a little help from the moon) will smudge out the sun. A total solar eclipse will mark the brow of the United States with a Stygian darkness so deep that stars will unmask in midday. From Lincoln City, Ore., to Charleston, S.C., “fly-over” America will go dark.

In Hebrew tradition, the darkening of the sun or reddening of the moon are markers of cataclysmic political events with spiritual consequences. In Greek, eclipse means

wedding band” God slipped on our finger millennia ago falls to dust.

“There were stars,” Dillard writes. “It was all over.”

While an eclipse doesn’t unmake the covenant, it does give us pause to remember it. In the eighth century B.C.E., the prophet Amos experienced a solar eclipse during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Amos declared God’s warning to Israel’s urban elite: “I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day” (8:9) to rouse them from their affluenza and heedless assent to legislation that put unsustainable burdens on the poor and demoralized those who sought justice in the courts. Darkness in the day would remind the powerful to “grieve over the ruin of Joseph” (6:6), the tarnished ring of the covenant.

AN ECLIPSE SHADOW sweeps across the landscape at more than 1,500 miles per hour, a veiled demon barreling down on anyone in its path. Onlookers have been known to scream.

America’s own political demons are stealthier, the evil we do seemingly more banal. Revenge or sadism doesn’t drive it. Instead we rather carelessly use evil as an instrument to an end—most often to establish dominance over a group not our own. When driven by high moral ideals (often religious, liberal and conservative), we may claim our “good cause”

overrides the violent means of achieving it.

The danger of such idealistic evil is that it confers the right to hate. If “our group” intends what is good, then those “against us” must not be good. And is it not righteous to hate what is evil?

(At the Arab Islamic American Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, this spring, Trump said, “We can only overcome this evil if the forces of good are united and strong—and if everyone in this room does their fair share and fulfills their part of the burden.” His speech paved the way for U.S. weapons manufacturers to sign billion-dollar contracts with some of the world’s worst human rights offenders.)

This is our slow-motion shadow, the veiled demon that eclipses the human heart.

If you are in the path of totality on Aug. 21, you will be able to see layers in the sun—its corona, chromosphere, gusts of solar plasma. You will see the fire at the heart of everything.

Then it will all start over. The disc of the moon’s shadow will slip. Creation will groan, like a drowned person coughing up the sea. Again, the wedding band will be offered.

Will we renew our vows to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly” with our God? ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



Flyover America will go dark.

“abandonment,” in Hebrew “defect.” God’s light is in a state of hiddenness.

In her essay “Total Eclipse,” Annie Dillard describes the solar eclipse visible in Yakima, Wash., in 1979, a shadow cast across the northern states. “In the black sky was a ring of light,” she writes. “It was a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old, worn ring. It was an old wedding band in the sky, or a morsel of bone. There were stars. It was all over.”

It was like God closing the lid on the world, says Dillard—and the world beginning promptly to die.

Foundational to biblical teaching is that “creation” is God’s covenant with Israel. When God *un*-creates the world, the covenantal community (humans, field mice, nematodes, yuccas, summer storms, seedlings) simply withers. The “old, thin silver

CIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
DJA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

CCDA NATIONAL
CONFERENCE

DETROIT
OCTOBER 4-7

@iamccda | #ccdaDetroit

/iamccda

ccda.org

Resilience



20
17

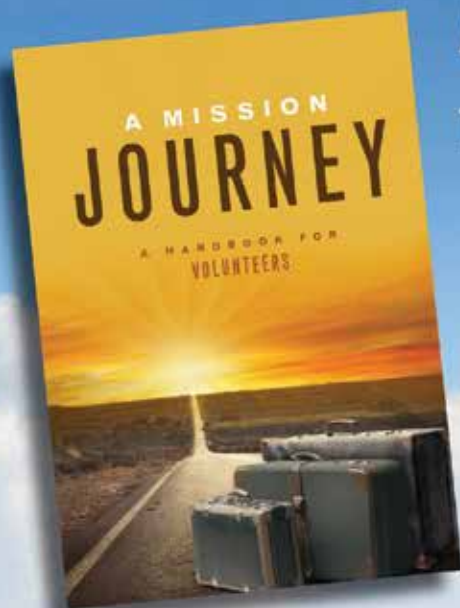
CCDA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

DETROIT

OCTOBER
4-7, 2017

Ephesians
6:10

RENAISSANCE
CENTER



A MISSION JOURNEY

The official guide for YOUR mission journey

This UMVIM handbook is for team leaders, team members, and others who will get involved in short-term mission volunteer journeys. It encourages short-term mission volunteers to reflect on the reasons *why* they engage in mission and *how* they prepare to be more intentional about relationships with those they encounter on their journeys.

A Mission Journey is available from the Upper Room Bookstore in paperback for \$17 or in e-book format for \$9.99.

<http://bookstore.upperroom.org> • 800-972-0433

Upper Room provides discounts for bulk orders. Call for more details.

 **GLOBAL MINISTRIES**
The United Methodist Church

After ISIS

Can Iraqi Christians go home again?

by ANNA LEKAS MILLER

DOZENS OF CHURCHGOERS are dressed in their Sunday best outside St. John's Church in Qaraqosh, Iraq. Before entering, each person is individually searched. First, they are patted down for suicide vests. Then their bags are inspected for weapons.

It is Easter—the first to be celebrated in this church since Islamic State (ISIS) militants were driven out of Qaraqosh, formerly Iraq's largest Christian-majority city, by Iraqi forces after nearly three years of conflict.

Everyone is cautious. A week earlier, ISIS suicide bombers killed more than 40 people, including themselves, at two churches in northern Egypt during Palm Sunday services.

"There is no difference between what happened last week in Egypt, and what is happening in Iraq," Lt. Majd of the Nineveh Plain Protection Units told *Sojourners*. This sectarian militia formed after ISIS captured the northern region in 2014, and recently fought alongside the Kurdish peshmerga forces to recapture Qaraqosh from the Islamic State. Now the militia acts as a local security force, checking for weapons, land mines, and other potential threats.

"We have to check everyone," Majd said, smiling while cocking his gun. "We are still being actively persecuted." He ushers worshippers into the church.



Photos by Cengiz Yur Jr.

Using cellphones and candles for light, Iraqis celebrate Christmas Mass in 2015 in the Ainkawa neighborhood of Erbil, where many Christians live after fleeing ISIS. Above, a mural defaced by ISIS outside the Church of Mart Shmony in Bartella, Iraq.



Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Sako led an 85-mile march for peace and unity from Erbil to Alqosh, Iraq, during Holy Week this year.



AFP

Even though it has been more than six months since the fighting ended between Iraqi security forces, the Kurdish peshmerga, and Islamic State, vestiges are everywhere of the two-and-a-half-year ISIS reign. The centuries-old arches that adorn the church courtyard are riddled with bullet holes. No one has bothered to pick up the bullet casings, and they still pepper the ground leading to the church door.

Inside, “Allah Akbar”—“God is Great”—remains etched into the ornate marble pillars framing the altar, where ISIS extremists left their mark. Though the paint is frayed around the edges—a clear effort to remove it in time for the Easter services—it stubbornly remains.

“Before this, we only had the love of Jesus and Mary—we didn’t use weapons,” Majd explained. Now, he said, nearly everyone is armed. The protection of a once-strong community has shattered.

In years past, worshippers would have arrived on Easter Sunday at least an hour early to secure a seat. This year, only a few families have come in from surrounding villages or camps for “internally displaced persons.” By the time Mass begins, the church remains two-thirds empty.

“What is needed for this place to be stable is people,” Majd said, looking toward a few church-goers mingling in the courtyard. “We need people to come back and rebuild,” he continued. “We are a homesick people. And homesickness is just another version of death.”

‘We can’t go back like this’

Less than 20 miles away, many of Mosul’s majority Sunni Muslim population are returning to neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city. But displaced Christians are not so eager, even though most of their villages have been liberated for longer.

One reason is that their villages have been significantly more damaged. While ISIS fighters used all of Mosul and the surrounding areas as their playground, they intentionally destroyed the Christian villages because of their significance to the religious minority.

“We want to come back, with all of our hearts, but how can we when there is nothing to come back to?” asked Mounira Bahnan, a resident of Qaraqosh who now

lives in Erbil’s Christian neighborhood of Ainkawa, along with thousands of other internally displaced persons from Christian villages outside of Mosul.

Though Bahnan came to the village to observe Easter, moving back to rebuild her destroyed home is not practical—and seeing the remains of her village is painful. “When we see our village, we become upset,” she said. “There is no electricity or water. Our homes are burned, and there is no guarantee that what happened will not happen again.”

Since many of the security forces who drove out ISIS have moved on to the front lines in the western half of the city, Qaraqosh residents are afraid that remaining ISIS sympathizers could threaten the village with suicide bombings or attract U.S. drone strikes as they have in other areas in eastern Mosul.

During Holy Week, the Chaldean Christian patriarch, Louis Sako, led an 85-mile peace march open to Christians and Muslims, to promote peace and an end to violence. The route began in Ainkawa and ended in Alqosh, another Christian city on the outskirts of Mosul. More than 100 people participated, according to a Vatican press agency. “There is no forgiveness when everyone tries to take the law into his own hands. It is up to us to open our eyes to the importance of peace, dialogue, and coexistence,” Patriarch Sako said. “Something is moving in Iraq. ... Finally, people are choosing to build bridges rather than put up barriers. ... Peace must be achieved by us [religious leaders] as well as politicians, through courageous initiatives and responsible decisions.”

In some regions, civil society groups such as the Iraqi Social Forum are introducing participatory programs to rebuild communities after ISIS has left. In January, the Iraqi Civil

Society Solidarity Initiative addressed alternatives to military intervention in communities torn apart by ISIS, including prioritizing economic assets to focus on transitional justice and compensation models to break revenge cycles; providing psychological support for victims and the integration of abducted women; limiting abuse by authorities; preventing politicians from using

ISIS as an excuse for maintaining their own power; and developing nonviolence and peace education at all levels of society.

The residents of Qaraqosh, as Christians, feel particularly vulnerable and forgotten as the Iraqi government sup-

ports the liberation of the rest of the city but neglects the reconstruction of their villages. “If you keep on looking, you just keep on crying,” Bahnan said, holding back tears. “Everything has been looted and burned. We can’t go back like this.”

Rebuilding homes and lives

Many displaced Christians question whether they can bear to return to their ancestral lands and afford to rebuild their destroyed homes; others worry about the end of Christianity in Iraq.

“We, as Assyrian Christians, are on the verge of extinction,” said Juliana Taimoorazy, an Assyrian Catholic who grew up in Iran and founded the U.S.-based Iraqi Christian Relief Council. “The only way we can sustain our culture and our language is in our homeland.”

Iraq was once home to the fourth largest indigenous Christian population in the Middle East. When the United States invaded in 2003, Christians were accused of collaborating with the invading forces, triggering a series of attacks on Christians in Baghdad and Mosul. Christians were

ISIS fighters intentionally destroyed the Christian villages.

Displaced
Christians
wonder if they
can afford
to rebuild;
others worry
about the end of
Christianity
in Iraq.



Top, Christians take communion at Easter Mass at St. John's Church in Qaraqosh, Iraq. Above, remnants of a statue salvaged from a church destroyed by ISIS.

targeted in the street, forcing them to stay confined in their homes or flee for their lives. Al Qaeda suicide bombers blew themselves up inside churches, killing hundreds of people at a time.

Many Christians fled Baghdad and Mosul for the Nineveh plain—a historically Christian region and home to diverse religious minorities—for peace and security. But when the Islamic State stormed Mosul and the surrounding area in 2014, the few residents remaining in this predominately Christian region were given a brutal choice: convert or pay a “head tax.” If they refused, they would be killed. Those who could left the country. Others sought refuge in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, migrating to Christian enclaves such as the Ainkawa neighborhood in Erbil, which has granted refuge to Iraqi Christians.

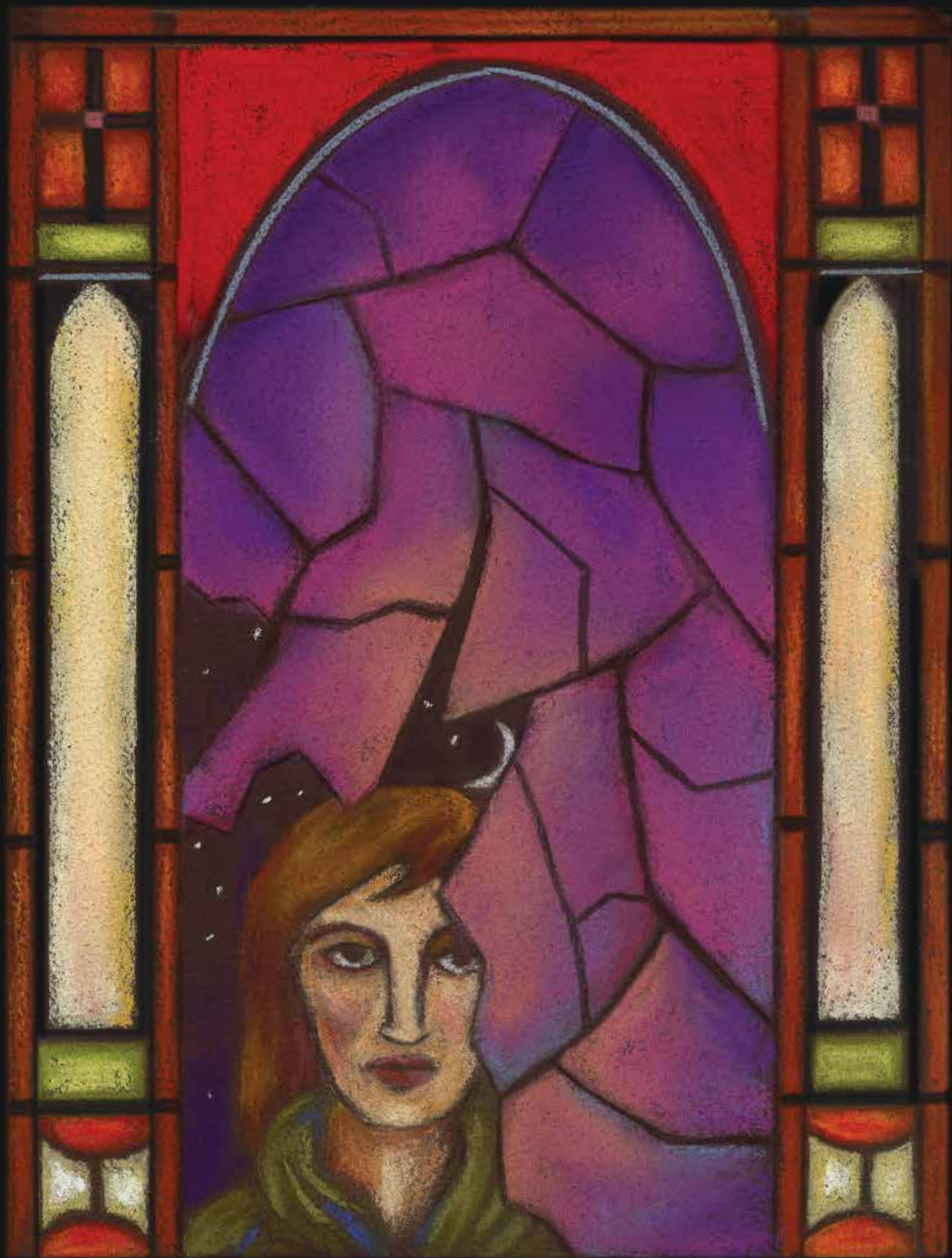
Fewer than 500,000 Christians are now left in Iraq, down from 1.5 million in 2003. Fearing religious extinction, many are advocating that the displaced return home now that ISIS has been driven out. “Good-hearted Christians in the U.S., or the West in general, hear that Christians in Iraq or Syria are being persecuted and immediately think that the international community needs to get them out,” Taimoorazy explained. “[But] they don’t want to leave their homeland. [They] want to live their lives where doctors can be doctors again and lawyers can be lawyers.”

However, most of those displaced by the fighting are more concerned with finding resources to rebuild their homes than with what their return might mean to the global Christian community.

“Of course I want my future to be in Qaraqosh,” Bahnan said, looking around the church. “But when I am here, I see only the land—I no longer see my home.” ■

Anna Lekas Miller is an independent journalist based in Erbil, Iraq.

Photos by Cengiz Yur Jr.

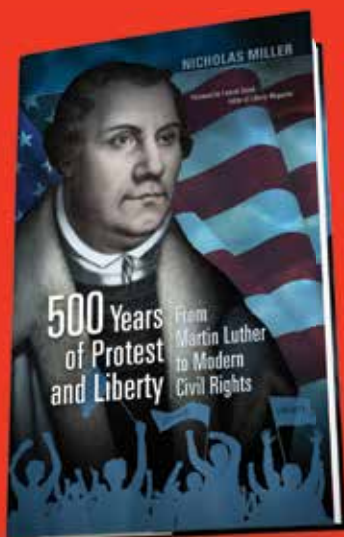


Skin in the Game

**How could I remain in a church that made no space
for my brutalized past? • by RUTH EVERHART**

THE COLD STUNG my skin, even though I'd rubbed a protective layer of balm on my cheeks. Our breath mingled and condensed in a cloud of vapor. Doug and I grabbed hands and ran across the parking lot. He opened the driver's door, and I scooted across the bench seat as quickly as I could. My long wool coat did not slide well. Doug climbed in after me and cranked the ignition, which caught immediately. His mustard-colored Volare was dilapidated, but a good starter. Who cared if the passenger door no longer opened? This was January in Minnesota.

Wordlessly, we listened to the engine rumble. Time was running out, and yet another church had failed to meet our hopes. The sermon had been lackluster. There'd been zero women in leadership. Nothing had clicked. We wanted more than a wedding venue; we wanted a church home.



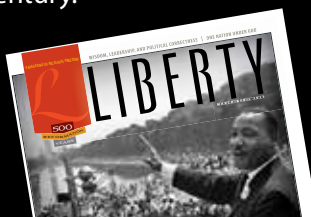
Does the Protestant arc run from Martin Luther's Priesthood of All Believers to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s civil rights movement? Or to Donald Trump's populist nationalism?

Nicholas Miller, JD, PhD has appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court and is author of the best-selling *Religious Roots of the First Amendment* (Oxford, 2012)

Buy the book now at Liberty500.com

BONUS

Purchases include a subscription to *Liberty*, the award-winning magazine and chronicle of religious liberty for more than a century.



I said, 'I am done with it!'

I unwrapped my scarf to speak. "Maybe next Sunday we should try that Christian Reformed Church my mom keeps suggesting."

"Are you serious? I thought you were never going back to the CRC!"

"I know. But we're running out of options." The windshield cleared as the defroster churned and huffed. "Maybe I didn't need to abandon them entirely."

"You abandon *them*?" Doug spoke with uncharacteristic anger. "You needed them and *they* abandoned *you*!"

"I know. I know." I'd told him about the crime I'd endured and how alone I'd felt. How nothing made sense and no one could help. But there was something I couldn't express, to him or to anyone: the feeling of damage that could never be repaired. "But we're not finding anything better, so maybe it's time to go back. To try again."

Doug shook his head as he put the car in reverse, but I knew he would do as I asked, even if he had reservations. He knew I missed the comfort of the church—the church that had been my cradle. As we pulled out of the parking lot, I laid my gloved hand on his knee and played a silent game of pretend. I couldn't go back in time and undo the crime, but maybe I could slip back into my old life as if that awful night had never happened. After all, I had a fiancé now. Maybe I could lay my questions to rest by pretending that no violent act had ever spurred them.

THE NEXT SUNDAY we headed to that Christian Reformed Church. As before, I tugged at my wool coat and slid across the frigid seat. Under my coat I had on the same church-going outfit I'd worn the Sunday before, and the Sunday before that—a bias-cut plaid skirt and a purple batwing sweater. Doug was wearing his puffy down jacket, a pair of corduroys, and a pullover sweater. He never seemed to get as cold as I did. I teased that his mustache kept him warm.

As we entered the church, Doug whispered, "We should have dressed better." The men were wearing dark suits and ties and impeccable white shirts. The women had on dressy dresses and carried expensive-looking handbags.

"Like we even have those kind of clothes," I whispered back.

This sanctuary was more modern than the churches I'd attended growing up. The dais was raised, with seats curving around. A prelude was playing, but it was recorded music rather than an organ. Even though we'd arrived early, we ended up sitting closer to the front than I would have chosen, right underneath the pulpit. On the other side of me was a woman about my age. She had her husband on the other side of her; their small child was sandwiched between them.

Opening the bulletin, I read that today, Jan. 22, 1984, was the 11th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. In response, the service would address the sanctity of life. I was immediately filled with foreboding. I remembered the 1973 decision vividly. I'd been a sophomore in a Christian high school in New Jersey at the time. Many of our mandatory chapel services had been devoted to the evils of abortion. We had been required to debate the subject in Bible class, although pity the student who was assigned the wrong side. Busloads of high schoolers went down to Washington, D.C., to march with placards showing pictures of aborted fetuses.

The early part of the service was standard fare—hymns and the reading of the Ten Commandments before a prayer of confession. The preacher was an older white man wearing a well-cut gray suit. His slicked hair showed the ridges of a comb's teeth. He made precise, symmetrical hand movements as he spoke.

The scriptures included verses from Deuteronomy ("Choose life") and 1 Timothy ("Women shall be saved by childbearing"). The preacher railed against women who sought abortions, painting them as cavalier and comfort-seeking. The sermon bore no surprises, but as I listened something strange happened. I could no longer control my thoughts. My mind went back more than five years, to the night of the crime. I once again entered the emergency room and felt the bright lights of the examining room. I saw the nurses' heads, bent over my pelvis. I felt the scraping of the comb and heard the crackling of the paper envelope as the doctor collected hairs for the rape kit.

What if I had gotten pregnant? What then?

The thought made my heart beat so hard

And with that, I slipped out of my childhood church the way a snake sheds its skin.

that I felt nauseated and light-headed. I bent my head low to catch my breath. Doug squeezed my hand, but I didn't look at him. If I saw the compassion on his face, I'd erupt in tears. By now the preacher was thundering: Repent! He called for judgment on the heads of those who sought abortions, on all those who disregarded the sanctity of life! My head was bent but my will pushed back. *He doesn't know. He has never passed through that valley of shadows.*

Part of me wanted to walk out. What would that be like? I had never walked out of a church. I continued to clutch Doug's hand but considered standing up. I would say, Excuse me. Everyone would turn and look at the stranger, at the woman with the contorted face.

Part of me wanted to wait. The preacher might deviate from the script. He might pause and add a parenthesis, a footnote. "Except, of course, for pregnancies caused by rape." He would say this in a grandfatherly tone. It would be a concession. It wouldn't be enough, of course, but it would be something, a nod to the complexity of being female, to the reality of having a womb, to circumstances this man could never possibly know. That concession would give me the tiniest space to inhabit. With that I could manage to remain sitting in this sanctuary. I could continue to occupy this space with my body, my female body with its brutalized past.

AT LAST IT CAME. The preacher used many words to set up the question, but it boiled down to this: Should a woman who becomes pregnant as the result of rape be permitted to have an abortion?

His answer was strident and certain and scolding. This was not a footnote, but the pinnacle of his message: "No! Absolutely not! That child had been conceived by the will of God!"

I suppose he went on to quote Bible verses, but I can't pretend I heard. I could no longer hear anything. The blood pounded through my head, creating a roar in my ears. I was familiar with this ironclad notion of God's sovereign will, a doctrine that could be twisted to mean such monstrous things. Nothing that happened could ever be outside of God's will: no war, no birth defect,

no atrocity. God willed all these calamities.

Before I experienced brutality, I could even believe such a doctrine.

But now?

I confess that there are many things I do not know about God. Like the psalmist, I don't know how God charts the stars in the heavens. I don't know the course of the sea monsters who sport in the deep. I don't know where the whirlwind blows. And I certainly don't know if God is pleased, overall, with the humans God made to walk upon this earth. But I do know that God is good. I know that God is love. And I know that God did not will for me to be raped.

My being raped was not God's will, but the rapist's. How did the preacher not know this? By definition, rape is violence wreaked upon a person's body against their will. Two human wills struggle and one prevails. How do people of faith ignore such a fundamental fact? We are set down in a world where human wills collide and crash.

Call it sin. Call it the legacy of sin. Call it slavery, or patriarchy, or domination. Call it principalities and powers. Call it what you will, but show some humility!

My reaction to the preacher was not composed in careful sentences. Some of the things I know took years to put into words, and more years to speak them aloud. But that Sunday morning, I knew enough. I knew that *if* my rapist had impregnated me, and *if* I had been forced to carry that pregnancy to term, and *if* I had been forever tied to my rapist and his violent act by the most

enduring bond humanity knows—an umbilical cord—I *would have* been ruined forever. My ruination would not have been a dark valley to pass through but a state of being, complete and irreparable.

Finally, the preacher pronounced the benediction. As people stood to leave, I turned to the woman beside me and asked, in a voice I sought to control, "Do you think most of the people here agree with the preacher?"

She looked surprised at the question. She glanced at my reddened, quavering face and said, "Of course." Then she collected her beautiful purse and her handsome husband and her well-behaved child, and they exited the row in the other direction.

My fury impelled me out of the church and into the mustard-colored Volare and across the bench seat. My vapor-breath felt like power. I was breathing fire. When Doug got in and slammed the car door, I said, "I am done with it, done with it, done with it!" And with that, I slipped out of my childhood church the way a snake sheds its skin. What I had once lived in was behind me, lifeless and dead.

I had always wondered if it hurt a snake to shed a skin. Suddenly, I knew that it did not. The new skin had been forming underneath the old in an invisible calculus of growth. The new skin might look smooth and vulnerable, but it was tough.

Doug eased the car out of the parking lot, and I looked ahead. Some day we would find the right church. Meanwhile I no longer needed to explain myself, or my past, to anyone. I would simply refuse to make God into a monster. I would refuse to hate the skin God gave me. I would live in that skin and love it. I would love the God who gave me such vulnerable, tough woman's skin. ■

Ruth Everhart (rutheverhart.com) is a Presbyterian pastor and the author of *Ruined*, which received a 2017 book award from Christianity Today.





Better

For those living in rural villages,
the answer to emigration is
often simple: Restore the land
to restore the future.

A deforested hillside in
Oaxaca, Mexico, that is being
restored for farming.

Than a Wall

In Mexico, rural farmers resist emigration by building local economies • *by* ANNELISE JOLLEY

FOR 18 YEARS, Ángel Pérez's parcel sat barren. His remote village in southern Mexico offered no employment, and his only resource—his land—had been depleted by decades of overuse. When his son Manolo grew old enough, Manolo emigrated north to find work, following the footsteps of half the community and leaving his father behind. Desperation led Ángel to drink. Bottle in hand, he stared down his two options: leave his home, his community, and his land, or resign himself to a life of scarcity. (Ángel and Manolo are pseudonyms used for privacy reasons.)

In 2014, a surge of Central American refugees streamed north through Mexico. They traveled under the stars through drug cartel territory, slipped past human traffickers, and arrived at the U.S. border pleading for sanctuary.

The following year carried another wave of asylum-seekers north. Meanwhile, the international community faced the worst refugee crisis since World War II as millions fled civil war and religious persecution in the Middle East.

Amid this global crisis, the Pew Research Center announced a surprising find: Emigration from Mexico itself was at its lowest in 20 years. Between 2009 and 2014, more Mexican immigrants returned to Mexico than came to the States. Mexicans now comprise a dwindling majority of the U.S. undocumented immigrant population—just over half, as of 2014.

Photos by Shaun Boyle



Clockwise from left, Ángel Peréz and son Manolo with a two-year-old avocado tree; pine tree saplings used in reforestation; a woman works in a community garden.

Immigration's receding tide can be traced to several factors, including harsher prosecution of undocumented workers, drug cartel violence in northern Mexico, more policing along the border, and a weakened post-recession economy. Of those who returned to Mexico after time in the States, most said they came home for the families they left.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, when I visited Ángel and Manolo in Oaxaca, Mexico, the topic of immigration had reached fever pitch. Certain words rang out above the din: Mexico. Ban. Wall. With the country's eyes trained on the U.S.-Mexico border, the issue continues to divide communities, churches, and families. Partisan rhetoric pits jobs and homeland security against the biblical call to love the neighbor and welcome the stranger.

Crossing from Mexico into the U.S. means leaving home, family, and country behind. The fact that more Mexicans are returning home than entering the U.S. proves something that's been true for years: Most people don't want to emigrate. They want dignified employment and a reason to stay home. In rural farming communities across southern Mexico, they've found both.

A reason to stay

Undocumented Mexican immigrants still provide a large share of agricultural labor in states such as California and Texas, picking grapes or stooping over rows of strawberries season after season. But in rural communities across the border, a different narrative has taken root. In southern Mexico, subsistence farmers tend their own land instead of fields thousands of miles north. Their communities care for the earth like their lives depend on it—and they do.

Ángel Peréz's community, Coatecas Altas, is one of Oaxaca's many rural Indigenous villages. Tucked in the mountains 45 miles from the capital city of Oaxaca, Coatecas Altas years ago stopped receiving government support or outside resources. Families survive through subsistence farming, eating and selling whatever they can coax from the soil. Considering that the land has lost most fertility after decades of deforestation and over-farming, this is no easy task.

The hills around Coatecas Altas show

wounds where trees have been slashed and burned, the soil eroded in landslides. Cinderblock walls line the main road into the community. Metal gates painted gold conceal houses built with remittances, the money sent home by emigrants. U.S. influence is visible elsewhere: On the basketball court—a slab of concrete next to the chapel—the word “Jordan” is stenciled on backboards.

“The main industry in Coatecas is emigration,” says Noé Ramírez. Ramírez is a locally employed staff member of Plant With Purpose (formerly Floresta), a U.S.-based Christian development organization that equips farming families to restore their

These days, fewer
and fewer men leave
to go north.

land and grow out of poverty. (I worked with Plant With Purpose from 2013 to 2015.)

Three-quarters of the world's poorest people depend on the land to survive, and Plant With Purpose was founded to address the link between rural poverty and environmental destruction. Since 1984, the organization's holistic approach has integrated environmental, economic, and spiritual renewal. Plant With Purpose now partners with farming communities in Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Thailand, Burundi, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Developing rural agriculture is essential for building community resilience, according to research by the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). A recent report shows that sustainable farming addresses root causes of migration in rural areas. Not only that, it can shift major tides of refugees and migrants. While orderly and regular migration is both inevitable and, at times, economically beneficial, the FAO points out that “migration should be a choice, not a necessity.”

For families in rural Mexico, especially in Oaxaca and Chiapas—two of the country's poorest states—migration is almost always an economic necessity. Recent studies show that migration to the U.S. from these regions is typically an “adaptation strategy

in response to economic and social vulnerability,” one particularly sensitive to climate change.

Other organizations are working to change this reality by increasing land and food security. In the Mixteca Alta region of Oaxaca, the Center for Integral Farmer Development (locally known as CEDICAM) trains farmers in sustainable food production and environmental conservation. Like Plant With Purpose, CEDICAM promotes the use of cover crops, organic compost, and natural soil erosion barriers to revive farmland. Since its inception in 1997, the Mexican NGO has seen a fourfold increase in yields among partnering farmers—and a reduction in migration.

Last October, I traveled from San Diego to Oaxaca on a trip with Plant With Purpose. Its Mexico program, known locally as Misión Integral, was founded in 1999, and the group has partnered with Coatecas Altas since 2011. As we bumped along the road to Coatecas, Ramírez explained that no one, including Ángel, wants to leave the community. The journey is risky: Traveling to northern Mexican states such as Sonora or to the U.S. means crossing through drug cartel territory. Once they arrive, migrants usually work menial jobs thousands of miles from home. Meanwhile, their families fight to survive off their own depleted land.

“[People] emigrate because they have no alternative,” Ramírez says. “If they don't have anything to eat, they're going to leave and look for some form of employment.”

To stay, they need a way to survive. Plant With Purpose teaches subsistence farmers how to maximize the resources they already possess: soil, water, and agricultural know-how. As people learn to build soil fertility and grow more crops, families eat better, earn an income, and send their children to school. Sustainable farming empowers communities to survive and even thrive on their land, which means fathers, brothers, and sons stay put.

For Ángel, everything changed when he began healing his land. Suddenly his options expanded, and he found he could make a living in his own community by farming. For those living in rural villages such as Coatecas, the answer to emigration is often simple: Restore the land to restore the future.



The family orchard

After several years working migrant jobs harvesting cucumbers and tomatoes, Manolo returned home. At that time opportunities in his community were just as slim as when he left. He fell into the same patterns of alcoholism and depression as his father had while their plot of land, purchased almost two decades earlier, remained untouched.

Then a neighbor knocked on their door. A former migrant, this neighbor was sympathetic to their story. He invited them to church and then home to visit his farm. With the help of Plant With Purpose, he'd planted an orchard and started growing seedlings in a greenhouse. He told Ángel and Manolo about the projects and how his family was building a better life in Coatecas.

When they saw the family orchard, Manolo says, "We were convinced to start on our own land."

Ramírez met with Ángel and Manolo and offered to train them to prepare their parcel for crops. He suggested planting avocados, which are traditionally only grown in the western Mexico state of Michoacán. Ángel and Manolo looked at their abandoned land and said, "Why not?" Coatecas Altas has a similar climate and soil to Michoacán, and the avocado saplings flourished on the Perez's hillside farm.

Father and son used the sustainable-agriculture training they received to maximize every inch of their plot. They used part of the hillside to grow corn, squash, and tomatoes. They planted pine trees above the avocados, harvested runoff water for irrigation, and gathered grass during the dry season for animal feed. Theirs is the first avocado orchard in the community. The 70 trees are now two years old and already bearing fruit. While avocado trees in Michoacán produce fruit once each year, the Perez's variety produces avocados twice

yearly. Not only have Ángel and Manolo returned fertility to their soil, they've also established a source of food and income for years to come.

The success of their orchard prompted other Coatecas families to see their land as an answer to poverty. Neighbors were initially hesitant about trying new techniques such as conserving water, co-planting crops, and composting. But when they saw the changes in Ángel's and Manolo's lives—more income, healthier land, renewed dignity—the response shifted from reluctance to excitement. "Vamos a intentarlo!" they said. We'll give it a try!

Today, families across Coatecas are caring for their land through sustainable farming. Saplings grow on farms and the hill-sides are lush with crops. Water is returning to the dry streambeds, which farmers capture and distribute. Families tend gardens and raise chickens, generating an income in their own backyards by selling produce at local markets. Once defined by poverty and emigration, the people of Coatecas have grown rooted and resilient.

'This is the plan now'

Not many years ago this community was gripped by violence. This was due in large part to emigration: Young men traveled to the U.S. for work and returned years later carrying loneliness and addictions. "For years this area and this community were considered very dangerous," says Ramírez. "But it's not like that anymore. The people have a hunger for God and a hunger for peace."

Today fewer and fewer men leave to go north. Families work together to create opportunity at home, and the dignified work they've found in farming diminishes

addictions and violence.

Looking over their avocado parcel, wide brim hats shading their eyes, Ángel and Manolo credit its success to God's presence. God is here in the orchard, they say. They remember planting the first trees with Ramírez and praying around the saplings, their words mingling and rising into the wide Oaxacan sky.

Families in Coatecas are flipping the narrative of emigration. "People tell us, 'Now I don't have to go. I have an alternative,'" Ramírez says.

With each day that Ángel and Manolo work together on their farm, the threat of emigration and its attendant fears diminish. They've created a life for themselves in a place where they thought it was impossible to stay. "This is the plan now," Manolo says. "We don't need to emigrate anymore to the States—we can stay here."

"We hope to plant more avocados, pines, and fruit trees," he continues. He stands between two rows of avocados. Their waxy leaves point skyward. He points, too, toward the top of the hill where he will plant these seedlings. "We look forward to seeing these dreams come true." ■

Annelise Jolley is a freelance writer and editor currently earning her MFA in creative nonfiction. She lives in San Diego. Jolley previously worked as outreach coordinator for Plant With Purpose (plantwithpurpose.org).



CultureWatch
BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

By Ragan Sutterfield

An Economy of Gifts

Laura Dunn's *Look and See* engages the vision of poet-prophet Wendell Berry.

IT BEGINS WITH SPEED, the red flash of taillights in the night, the illuminated city bright against the dark. Over the images we hear a voice, resonant in its drawl as the images move to decimated mountains, poisoned streams, and rushing city crowds. The landscapes are swallowed by machines, the people lost to their digital devices as the voice offers a poem about a nightmare where all is sacrificed for an abstract "Objective." On-screen we are seeing that nightmare, and it looks very much like our daily lives.

The speaker is Wendell Berry, the poet, farmer, and prophet who has been among America's most sustained voices for the created world and the people and places that are among its members. Many of those who have read Berry say he changed their lives, but even though he has published more than 50 books and won literary accolades, including a National Humanities Medal given to him by President Obama, Berry is not particularly well known in many circles. It was that widespread lack of familiarity with Berry and the urgent goodness of his vision that prompted filmmaker Laura Dunn to create



Celesta Danger

Film director Laura Dunn



Farmer and writer
Wendell Berry

Inside CultureWatch

44 How to Liberate Scripture

Andrew Wilkes reviews
Always with Us?

45 No Easy Fixes

Julienne Gage on
The New Urban Crisis

46 Finding God in Traffic

Greg Williams reviews
Holy Spokes

This, then, would be her way of offering a portrait of Wendell Berry: Not to look *at* him, but to look *with* him at the landscape and people of his place, Henry County, Ky. In fact, between the film's premiere at SXSW (the South by Southwest festival) in 2016 and its showing at Sundance this year, there was a re-edit and retitling from *The Seer* to *Look and See*—a change made at Berry's request.

"What does he see?" was the guiding question of the film, Dunn says. "We tried

Berry offers "an aesthetic that allows for imperfection to be a part of the story."

to do an ethnographic portrait of Henry County ... not project some agenda onto the place, but just try to learn and see, and listen to the place itself."

Listening to the land and its people

The film remains a portrait of Berry, including stills of Berry over the course of his writing and farming life, accompanied by audio from the interviews Dunn conducted with him. But it also includes interviews with the small-to-medium-scale farmers who surround him. As we hear Berry and the other farmers who work this Kentucky land, we learn to recognize their love for the place and its way of life. We also learn to see the struggle of these farmers and the desperate lengths they go to remain.

Dunn talks about one of the young farmers she interviewed for the film, a man who grew up on a dairy farm: "His parents didn't want him to farm because they didn't see a lot of economic opportunity in it," Dunn says, "but for him it's just a passion and he's trying to figure it out." The young man is working side jobs, doing whatever he can to stay on the land. The story of farmers like this has been relatively untold. "I [wanted to show] the reality of the middle farmer, not the huge agribusiness farmer or the Ivy League-educated person who decides to come back to the land, buys 100 acres, and starts an organic CSA. Those are important people and an important part of Berry's

Continued on Page 43

New & Noteworthy



TUXEDOS ON ICE

Need a cold distraction from summer heat? Love penguins? Want to be inspired by rugged scenery and a field biologist's enthusiasm for his work, despite harsh conditions, endless counting, and climate change? The documentary film *The Penguin Counters* is now out on iTunes and DVD. First Run Features

FIND WHAT'S MISSING

In the picture book *Who Counts? 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, and 2 Sons*, biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine and children's book author Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso imaginatively retell three of Jesus' parables. Suitable for kids 4 to 8. Includes afterword for parents and teachers. Illustrated by Margaux Meganck. Westminster John Knox

AN AMERICAN STORY

Amir Hussain's *Muslims and the Making of America* is a compact overview of how Muslims have been an intrinsic part of American society, politics, and culture since the colonial era. Released last fall, but timelier than ever as anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions grow. Baylor University Press

NOT ALONE

In *Grieving a Suicide: A Loved One's Search for Comfort, Answers, and Hope*, Albert Y. Hsu explores the hard emotional and spiritual questions survivors face. First published in 2002, this newly revised and expanded version includes updated resources and a discussion guide for suicide-survivor groups. IVP Books

Guy Mendes her latest film, *Look and See*.

Dunn's earlier film *The Unforeseen* was a documentary about development around Austin, Texas, and the destruction that came with it. The film has a segment with Berry reading a poem as images pass by, very much like the opening of *Look and See*. After screenings of the film, many viewers asked who was reading the poem. Dunn decided to make a film about Berry, a person whose writings had deeply changed her own life. This would offer several logistical and creative challenges.

"I wanted to do a portrait of Wendell Berry," Dunn told *Sojourners* in a phone conversation. "And yet he didn't want the camera on him, and he doesn't want the attention on him. He talks about how we make idols of people and they're not real." Instead, Berry told Dunn, "I am my place, and the people are my place, and the people around me are who I am."

Message Control

AMONG THE THINGS the Trump administration has successfully disrupted is the media hierarchy within the White House press corps. These days the Christian Broadcasting Network gets called on at presidential press conferences and CNN gets ignored.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of this shift has been a chain of local TV stations called the Sinclair Broadcast Group, which currently reaches 38 percent of U.S. households with a blend of local news and right-wing messaging. Sinclair is a big power on the U.S. media landscape, and it's about to get a lot bigger and more powerful. Today the group owns 173 stations, but it is about to take advantage of a Trump administration change in media ownership rules to buy the 42 stations owned



Williams, who managed Ben Carson's presidential campaign. The head office in Baltimore regularly issues edicts to local news directors about "must run" stories, which almost always carry a right-wing spin.

This extension of conservative advocacy into local news is important because, believe it or not, local broadcast TV is still the most relied upon news source in the U.S., according to the Pew Center, well ahead of cable, news websites, or social media.

The 2016 Trump campaign saw the value of Sinclair's channel into America's heartland. Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner has said they gave Sinclair reporters privileged access to the campaign; Sinclair stations ran 15 interviews with candidate Trump, 10 with Mike Pence, and 10 more with Ben Carson and other Trump surrogates. This compared to no interviews with Hillary Clinton, five with Tim Kaine, and two with Chelsea Clinton. In addition, those 173 stations received "must run" orders attached to negative stories about Clinton, including one promoting conspiracy theories about her health.

And after all that "quid" here comes the "quo."

The FCC regulates how many TV stations any one company can own. Currently one company can't own

stations whose signal could potentially reach 39 percent of the U.S. population. There are two types of signals that broadcast-TV stations use, VHF (for channels 2 through 13) and UHF (channels 14 and up). Historically, UHF was a weaker signal, so a UHF station was presumed by the FCC to only reach half as many viewers as a VHF station.

With the conversion to digital broadcasting in 2009, the Obama-appointed FCC decided that the UHF distinction had become irrelevant and dropped it. This left the Sinclair Group at 38 percent of potential viewers and no room to grow.

However, one of the first acts of the Trump-appointed FCC was to bring the UHF rule back, thus allowing the Sinclair-Tribune merger. As Jeff Guo at Vox.com pointed out, "If by next year only a quarter of households in Sinclair's distribution area watched the local news on a Sinclair-owned station, that would still yield over 4 million nightly viewers—which is more than the typical audience for Fox News's top show *The O'Reilly Factor*."

And did we mention that O'Reilly is looking for a job? ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

Sinclair is emerging as a broad national media voice that skews to the right of Fox.

by Tribune Media, including outlets in New York and Los Angeles and the Chicago-based WGN America cable channel.

While Fox News is weakened by internal bleeding and Bill O'Reilly is looking for a job, the Sinclair Group is poised to emerge as a national media voice that sometimes skews to the right of O'Reilly's old shop and has a much broader potential reach.

Sinclair first gained notoriety for using local news to push an ideological agenda back in 2004, with a plan—changed when it became public—to pre-empt its stations' programming in late October with a documentary showcasing false claims about John Kerry's Vietnam service. These days, Sinclair stations run *The Right Side*, a political talk show hosted by Armstrong

Continued from Page 41

story. But a lot of the farmers are the middle-sized to smaller generational family farmers who are being completely squeezed out by the global economic pattern."

Against that pattern, Berry points us to an economy of gifts. That vision is one rooted in Berry's Christianity, a theme that comes in at the edges of the film. "[Berry] talks a lot about listening and waiting. Listening to the birds and the water ... it is a different way to live than asserting your own voice," Dunn says. "It's the opposite of the kind of imperialist or industrialist worldview." She compares it to Facebook and Instagram, this attempt to present ourselves to the world rather than to see the world or let ourselves be seen in our

"Listening to the birds and the water ... is a different way to live than asserting your own voice," Dunn says.

imperfections and vulnerabilities. "There's a humbling," she says, "a humility that is necessary."

This sense of humble listening affected the aesthetics of the documentary. Dunn says that Berry offers "an aesthetic that allows for imperfection to be a part of the story." She tried to follow this in how shots were framed for the film. Dunn said that she "wanted the aesthetics of a worldview that celebrates the natural patterns, that recognizes us as finite beings against a larger creation." Filming in beautiful rural settings could offer a cinematographer the temptation of creating manicured images of green pastures and happy cows, like the images in our supermarkets that cover over the truth of industrial agriculture. Instead, Dunn said, "I didn't want a perfectly framed shot every time. You know that kind of killed the life of it; that's not really how we see."

While farming remains a central theme in the film, it also offers one vision of a life well lived, of a home economy that has found its place on earth. Central to this is Wendell Berry's wife, Tanya, who appears in the film and, with their daughter Mary,



From *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*

A SHORTAGE OF EMPATHY

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 is a strange sequel, both better and worse than the first. Better: It centers characters who in other movies would be marginalized; there's a large dose of wit and tenderness (sometimes at the same time: such as a wonderful Mary Poppins joke that brings a huge laugh of endearment); a fluid visual imagination; and an actual idea: What happens when Ego rules the universe?

Worse: While in the original, violence was meted out sparingly, in this second *Guardians* outing, killing solves everything. One of the most brilliantly designed special-effects scenes in the post-*Jurassic Park* era is also one of the most nihilistic: A lovable rogue liberates a prison by means of a magic arrow that can kill dozens without needing to be re-aimed. He does it whistling a happy tune, accompanied by a wisecracking raccoon and a pop song. It's cartoonish, of course, but I don't recall Tom or Jerry ever killing anyone; this scene, in a film that elsewhere exhibits imagination and delight, merely invites us to revel in carnage.

Couldn't we see the guardians dance their way into something other than annihilating their opponents? Couldn't the character who can transform suffering by touch have been employed in the service of healing the bad guy's megalomania? *Guardians Vol. 2* gets a lot right, especially in allowing unconventional characters to take the stage. But

it also carries on the tradition of family first and last, even if it means destroying everyone else.

David Foster Wallace once wrote, "If ... fiction can allow us ... to identify with a character's pain, we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying with our own ... We become less alone inside. It might just be that simple." It might.

There's no reason why this can't be true of blockbuster action movies—indeed, I think Marvel is trying to get there. One of the many things to grieve about the recent death of the great filmmaker **Jonathan Demme** is that he never got to make a Marvel movie. His works always invited empathy: for a young woman investigator targeted by misogyny in *The Silence of the Lambs*, for the father of the bride at a messy wedding in *Rachel Getting Married*, for gay characters previously ignored or pathologized in mainstream cinema in *Philadelphia*. Demme lived as if the purpose of art was to lead us to understand each other, or at least to recognize when we don't. He knew violence was a part of life and so should be a part of movies. He also had the kind of moral imagination that goes beyond merely playing killing for laughs. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

becomes as much a subject of the film as Wendell himself. Dunn says, “I joke to people that I want to retitle the film and call it a portrait of Tanya Berry ... for me as a mom and a homemaker, Tanya is a real mentor.” Dunn adds, “She imbues the domestic realm with so much artistry and artfulness, and purpose and meaning. But seeing that life in a kind of holistic way is not the way we’ve been raised. And so, she sets an example for me that is very inspiring.”

When Dunn is asked how her time spent with the Berrys affected her own life, she says that the lived vision Wendell and Tanya

represent offers a challenge to the way we all live, and to her personally. “It challenges you to really be more present in your own life,” Dunn says, “and to slow down and do what is important in your own life.”

Looking alongside Berry, through the eyes of this beautiful film, does the same. The viewer leaves challenged and changed, called to live more deeply as a creature, embracing what Berry calls “the given life in the given world.” ■

Ragan Sutterfield is the author, most recently, of Wendell Berry and the Given Life.

Reviewed by Andrew Wilkes

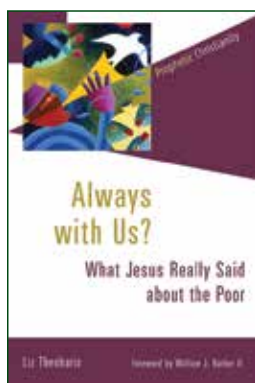
HOW TO LIBERATE SCRIPTURE

Always with Us? What Jesus Really Said about the Poor, by Liz Theoharis. Eerdmans.

MOST RADICAL JESUS theologies begin with the gospel of Luke. In a tour-de-force work, Liz Theoharis’ *Always with Us? What Jesus Really Said about the Poor* illustrates that the gospel of Matthew also offers a relevant statement of “God’s coming reign of abundance, dignity, and prosperity for all.” Centering this effort is Theoharis’ striving to “rethink the role of the church in the world and to challenge some of the most widely held misinterpretations of the Bible and poor people.”

Appropriate, accurate interpretation of Matthew 26:11, where Jesus says to the disciples that they have the poor always with them, is the burden of the book. In performing this task, Rev. Dr. Theoharis, founder and co-director of the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice and coordinator of the Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary, demonstrates the rarefied exegete’s blend: granular analysis and big picture vision. She effectively critiques the various theological justifications for structural poverty that stem, in part or whole, from a mishandling of this passage.

Through close reading of key terms in Matthew 26:11, socio-historical investigation into “the lived reality of the poor during



Jesus’ time and during contemporary times,” and literary analysis of Matthew’s gospel, Theoharis reconstructs Jesus’ social world and narrates his earthly ministry of meeting the survival needs of the poor, as a messiah who is a “peasant artisan.” Her Christology of poverty, in this regard, closely resembles theologian Karl Barth’s description of Jesus as the “partisan of the poor.” Her conclusion, briefly stated, is this: Matthew 26:11 is a Deuteronomy 15-influenced summons to end poverty by “forgiving debts, by outlawing slavery, and by restructuring society around the needs of the poor.”

Throughout the book Theoharis equalizes the playing field of biblical interpretation. Instead of minimizing the poor as nonspeaking objects of discussion and prioritizing the theologically educated as the sole experts, she insists on an interactive, humanizing method of Bible study that she calls “Reading the Bible with the Poor.” This method insists that liberating biblical interpretation proactively involves people living with poverty in interpreting their own situation. Indeed, the longest—and perhaps the best—chapter of the book explains how this process works.

Still, questions remain. While reading the book, one notices a relative absence of

theologizing about Jesus’ priestly role in the book of Matthew. There is, for instance, clear exposition about how Jesus’ blood is that of a martyred, resurrected messiah and prophet, but sparse treatment of how that same blood is “poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins.” A priestly account of Jesus is not inconsistent with Theoharis’ social-movement Christology. Its absence, however, makes it difficult to distinguish how Christ’s identity and work differs from the significance and continuing impact of an assassinated prophet such as, say, Martin Luther King Jr.

Theoharis’ text is distinguished by its detailed research and patient, persuasive argumentation. It is, further, the rare U.S.-published book that recommends and models interpretation of scripture led by people in poverty for explicitly emancipatory ends. *Always with Us?* is indispensable reading not only for the choir, but for convincing the undecideds and the indifferents of the possibility—indeed, the mandate—of refusing “to rest until all poverty is ended for everyone.” ■

Andrew Wilkes (@andrewjwilkes) is the principal of Wilkes Advocacy Group and an associate pastor at the Greater Allen A.M.E. Cathedral of New York.

Reviewed by Julie Polter

HOW TO LOVE LIKE YOU ARE DYING

The Art of Death: Writing the Final Story, by Edwidge Danticat. Graywolf
The Kind of Brave You Wanted to Be: Prose Prayers and Cheerful Chants against the Dark, by Brian Doyle. Liturgical Press

THE ART OF ... book series from Graywolf Press focuses on writing craft and criticism. In each compact volume an accomplished writer takes on a single element or theme. The most recent entry in the series is *The Art of Death*, by Edwidge Danticat.

Danticat’s reflections on a wide variety of literature that wrestles with death—from Taiye Selasi’s debut novel, *Ghana Must Go*, to C.S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed*—offer insights for readers as much as for writers. She explores the complicated emotional

landscape of death and mourning, but also the myriad ways, tangled in questions of both justice and mercy, that death comes: accident, illness, deadly disasters, suicides, executions.

Danticat frames the book with the experience of accompanying her mother as she died from ovarian cancer. She is unflinching, yet tender, as she describes the indignities visited on a dying body, reading the Bible and praying with her devout mother, and the specific intricacies of their love, shaped in part by immigration (from Haiti) and a long separation when Edwidge was a child. Every death, every grief, is different, but in a well-told story of one woman's loss is universal wisdom.

IN *PILGRIM at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard wrote, "I think that the dying pray at the last not 'please,' but 'thank you,' as a guest thanks his host at the door."

Before his death in May from a brain tumor, *Portland* magazine editor Brian Doyle wrote about the quick and the dead (including, more than once, road-kill squirrels), about the beauty of basketball, hawks, and his elderly parents, about growing up and staying Catholic, all imbued with unsentimental gratitude and self-deprecating humor. So it is true to form that Doyle's "Last Prayer" begins, "Dear Coherent Mercy: thanks. Best life ever."

Doyle was prolific, writing novels, essays, and prose-poems as well as editing several anthologies. *The Kind of Brave You Wanted to Be* is his second collection of "proems." They are snapshots of regular life and memories, often funny, all testifying that "Whatever we think is quotidian isn't," with nary a use of words like "holy" or "God." If you're unfamiliar with his style, it can take a few pages to enter the flow of his untraditional form. It's worth the small effort, and maybe will change, at least a little, the way you see and live the mundane, sacred moments of your own life.

In an essay in *Sojourners'* pages, Doyle made this simple-not-simple observation, a philosophy borne out in his writing: "You either walk toward love or away from it with every breath you draw." ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of *Sojourners*.

Reviewed by *Julienne Gage*

WHAT ENTREPRENEURS CAN'T FIX

The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class—and What We Can Do About It, by Richard Florida.
Basic Books

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, Richard Florida argued in *The Rise of the Creative Class* that cities fostering brainy interaction, creativity, and innovation would thrive, since modern capitalism was increasingly knowledge-based. His projections were acclaimed by artsy, back-to-the-city types (including many church planters) and scorned by activists and the low-income residents that gentrification displaced.

The critics were on to something, because since then many big cities have indeed gotten sexier, but not necessarily more reliable, especially for the masses. From 2006 to 2014, average incomes declined by 6 percent, while average rent prices soared by 22 percent. Today, about 21 million American renters are putting 30 to 50 percent of their income toward rent, with 30 percent representing the "cost-burdened" threshold.

Heeding his critics (and the evidence), Florida changes course in *The New Urban Crisis*, focusing on the big data that might lead policymakers and ordinary citizens to consider more-egalitarian solutions.

"As the affluent and advantaged return to the cities, they colonize the best locations. Everyone else is then crammed into the remaining disadvantaged areas of the city or pushed further out into the suburbs," he writes. He names multiple cities and neighborhoods where this has occurred, drawing on data from government entities and news outlets that he charts and maps in the back of the book.

Florida calls this "winner-take-all urbanism." The most affluent get wealthier while the blue collar and service classes that largely populated cities during the last half of the 20th century watch their cost of living increase and wages stagnate. Somewhere in the middle is the creative class, the bohemians and entrepreneurs who make a living but feel the squeeze.

"This new geography of class is deeply

damaging to our economic and social fabric," Florida writes, noting that while gentrification might improve schools, libraries, and other services and amenities in some parts of cities, suburbs are often declining. Longer work commutes further strain

finances for the working poor who have been pushed to the city outskirts.

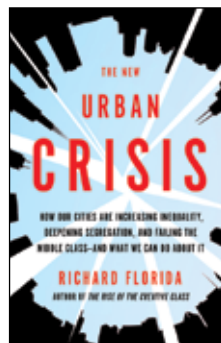
Florida had high hopes that a Hillary Clinton win could encourage greater top-down government analysis and solutions for cities and suburbs. He hoped to see more emphasis on federal housing policies, land taxes, mass transit aimed at stitching together the complex U.S. socio-economic patchwork, and, finally, a minimum wage set at 50 percent of the local median income, making service and working-class jobs more representative of the middle-class ideal. He envisioned a national department of cities and urban development to help bring these concepts together.

But with Trump at the helm, Florida says the best option may be increased civic and political engagement at the community level.

FLORIDA WAITS until the second-to-last chapter of the book to chew on the urban crisis worldwide, which is far more shocking than in the U.S. More than 60 percent of the infrastructure needed to accommodate the world's growing population over the next 50 years has yet to be built. In the next century about 7 to 8 billion people—roughly equivalent to the world's current population—will live in cities in the developing world.

And while words such as "innovation" and "entrepreneurship" are trendy in the international development sector, Florida is quick to acknowledge the shortcomings of this DIY strategy. He points to studies showing that poor people have great ideas but very little time or resources to execute them.

As the tumultuous Trump administration unfolds, *The New Urban Crisis* might





New from
MOUNTAIN CAT MEDIA LLC



Written in the casual tone of a friendly chat, the author discusses how the teachings of Jesus Christ support an egalitarian view. Exploring diverse subjects from the Nature of God to adultery, and even her unique view of Jesus' marital status. You're invited to sit down, have a cup of tea, and join in the conversation.

\$8.99 US / \$11.75 CAN

Available now from:

www.mountaincatmedia.com

www.amazon.com

ISBN-13: 978-0-692-81945-6

CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

become a coveted text for big data. It was released just as government web pages on topics such as climate change were removed and mere months before John H. Thompson, director of the U.S. Census Bureau, abruptly resigned. His departure may impede demographers working toward the 2020 census, an integral study for determining better distribution of resources for cities and suburbs.

It's hard to imagine any of Florida's suggestions playing out in the current political climate, but one can always hope. "Now more than ever, we have the basic logic of urban-led growth on our side," he writes. "Yet, history does not always progress in a simple, linear fashion. We may move backward before we can go forward again." ■

Julienne Gage is a Miami-based journalist who investigates economic development in the U.S. and the Caribbean.

Reviewed by Greg Williams

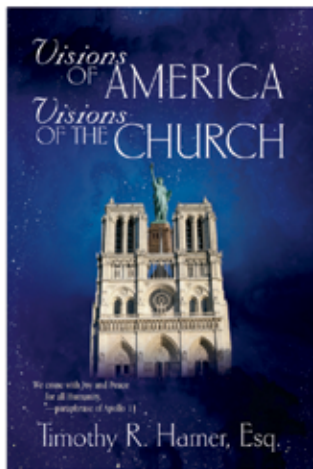
FINDING GOD IN TRAFFIC

Holy Spokes: The Search for Urban Spirituality on Two Wheels, by Laura Everett. Eerdmans

I LEARNED HOW to bike relatively late in life. I was 23, and it cut my commute in half. Since I'd been walking an hour each way for a night shift that started at 11 p.m., that meant a lot. My guru was an elder from my local church who lived across the alley. He taught me how to change a tire, gears, and my life. He showed me hospitality by teaching me about my bike, but it extended much further than that.

UCC minister Laura Everett does much the same thing in *Holy Spokes*. She uses the metaphor of a bike as a lens to discuss the broader issues of how to relate to people, the Earth, and God: Mostly how, to use Brother Lawrence's term, to practice the presence of God.

Everett takes the bike piece by piece, moving through it from wheel to handlebar and reflecting on the lessons that it teaches of patience, of grace to live with and learn from others, of taking up space (on the road and in life), and of knowing that you are fundamentally invisible for the cars rushing



Discover the ideal America first seen in the hearts of Abraham, Moses and Jesus, an America where we . . .

... seek to see ALL people blessed
... challenge pharaohs to let ALL people be free
... help ALL hurting people, without bias.

Find inspiration to fuel current struggles to realign our reality with this ideal America through the entwined narratives of American, Church, and Biblical history.

Visions of America, Visions of the Church
by Timothy R. Harner, Esq.
timharner.com



Foundations of Christian Leadership For Emerging Leaders

2 four-day in-person sessions

Full leadership assessment with personalized feedback
Develop your skills & relationships
Integrated worship, conversation & reflection
Multi-disciplinary faculty & community
Attendees considered for \$5000 grant

Houston, TX

Oct 23-26, 2017 and Jan 22-25, 2018

Great Plains/Omaha, NE

Nov 13-16, 2017 and Feb 19-22, 2018

*New England & DC coming in 2018-19

Program Cost: \$1500

Get Info & Apply: bit.ly/explore-focl

Theological. Practical. Transformative.



María Teresa Gastón
mtgaston@div.duke.edu
919.613.5355

past. Living in a city will teach you all these lessons anyway, but they come more quickly on a bike.

We need a more-robust spirituality of the city: We're an urban culture and Christianity is historically an urban religion. Yet we often think spirituality and Christianity are easier in a simpler, rural context. Imagine the early church's Egyptian hermits retreating to the desert or Thomas Merton moving from New York City to a monastery in Kentucky. We idealize places where we can be secluded or have neighbors who are like us, where we don't need to deal with a diverse city and the complex joys it brings.

So Everett's wisdom about practicing the presence of God where you actually find yourself—in traffic, rather than by a still pond or in a secluded cabin—is valuable. If you wait for tranquility to find God, you'll quickly run dry. We need to seek and receive God in the daily, the ordinary, and the commute if we want to draw close to God.

At the end of the book, Everett includes special bike-related liturgies, which sits uncomfortably with me. I'm a Reformed curmudgeon when it comes to worship, which makes me concerned that her "blessing of the bikes" and "ghost bike" services have little scriptural support. Do we need a structured ritual for blessing a means of transport or, for that matter, a memorial service that focuses laser-like on what the deceased was riding when they died? Everett finds that these liturgies speak to a pastoral need in Boston, which is fantastic. But for me they still cast a shadow on the rest of her excellent text.

I'm a terrible cyclist. Everyone passes me on my way to work, I've been stuck in second gear for a year and a half, and my brakes are held together with duct tape. Still, biking has taught me lots of things about life and a few things about God; it is one way the church has worked powerfully to help me.

The city has taught me even more—which is why I was thrilled that Everett used the lens of a bike to discuss a more-profound theology and spirituality of the city. *Holy Spokes* is a valuable contribution to building that spirituality and bringing all of us closer to God, even when we're in traffic. ■

Greg Williams (@gwilliamsster) is communications associate at an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.



Reuters

Road Out of Aleppo

Watching the evening news

He stumbles along in broken gait, pale face frozen in a blank stare, and all the long, long river of moving bodies pass him by. Even the frail move faster, framing him against their blur of anguish, like a film that runs slow motion, etching one small centerpiece against the screen of the unwilling eye.

Upon his back—as if coupled there, ribs fused to ribs—rides an ancient man, more skeletal than fleshed, skull rocking gently, rhythmically, arms crooked absurdly over the hard-set slope of shoulders, hands snatching at the brittle air. Thin-stick shanks dangle loosely over the young man's arms, bobbing with the plunge and stagger of his legs—like metronomes that pace the broken angle of each step.

And still they come, *he* comes—this strange, two-headed creature all its own, with its four unseeing eyes, its single haunted soul. Like a crab caught in an unrelenting tide—an awful metamorphosis, a horror that we cannot look upon, nor speak of, nor forget.

Still he comes, inseparable, inexorable. The dying and the young—a ghost that rides the shoulders of the world.

Judith Deem Dupree has published three books of poetry and Sky Mesa Journal, her first nonfiction book. She lives in Southern California and Colorado.

A Wild Welcome Table

WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY are more than trendy buzzwords or alignment with one set of politicized priorities over another. They are characteristics of the world that scripture constructs from the perspective of God and are deeply embedded in scriptures across genre and time. The constancy of that portrait makes clear that these are core values to be emulated and cultivated. In this season of growth, the selected texts paint a portrait of a loving God whose goodness is abundant. The growth that is called for is ours. We are to grow into the example God sets. The texts alternate examples of God's fidelity as earmarks of trustworthiness and the turn of the faithful to sure hope in God. God's fidelity is *not* limited to those who are called "God's people" or "Israel." Rather, God welcomes all peoples and nations and draws in the outcasts. This God is magnificent in power, yet tender and loving. These texts invite us to think beyond the immediate meaning to their application in our time. What does God's goodness and faithfulness look like in our world today? What does God's embrace of all peoples and nations mean in our world of international conflicts? Who are the outcasts now? And what ethical action do these texts require of us?



Welcome also requires adapting a posture of openness. Waiting is an apt posture for listening for God's word to our times. Welcoming the guest may also open the door for the word in flesh to arrive.

Wil Gafney is an associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

[AUGUST 6]

All Are Welcome

Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

THE WELCOME TABLE is waiting for all who hunger and thirst. The Isaiah reading begins with a plural "you" in Isaiah 55:1-4, then switches to a singular "you" in verse 5, in a time when the monarchy is no more and the survivors hope for a new beginning. Even with its specific address to the remnant of Judah, the passage speaks to wider humanity: Come! You are welcome. Sit, eat—it doesn't matter whether you can pay for it or not. This is the hospitality that welcomes refugees and continues in the psalm and gospel.

Psalm 145 makes clear that God is good to all, without qualification (verse 8), and that God's mother-love extends to everything that she has made (verse 9). That is especially important to hear in a time when some advocate for border walls while God offers a welcome table. (Both verses 8 and 9 use forms of the root *rhm*, meaning "womb," to express God's tender love, variously translated as "merciful" and "compassion.")

The psalmist declares that God loves

those who love God and offers neither conditions for nor exceptions from that love. God hears the cry of those who call to God "in truth" (verse 18) and fulfills the desire of those who "fear God" (verse 19); these descriptions may seem to be limitations, but are instead indications of broad accessibility. There is no ritual or religious prerequisite blocking access to God. The psalmist repeats the word "all" to show there are no limits on God's love.

Jesus sets the welcome table in Matthew 14 by feeding an untold number of women and children in addition to 5,000 men. Jesus' love, expressed as compassion, emerges from the *splagchna*, his innermost parts. The Greek articulation of compassionate love evokes God's mother-love in the Hebrew scriptures and Jesus' description of himself as a mother hen (Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34), gathering her children under the wings of God's love.

We acknowledge our failure to love as God loves as we remember the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki this week.

[AUGUST 13]

Learning from Paul

1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

WIND AND WATER disclose God and reveal God's power in the stories of Elijah and the whirlwind (1 Kings 19) and Jesus (and Peter!) walking on water (Matthew 14). Psalm 85 presents a less dramatic portrait of God using the attributes of righteousness and faithfulness. Romans 10 explores what righteousness looks like using creative exegesis of several passages from the Torah.

Paul's interpretive practice is instructive for those who argue about biblical interpretation. Paul starts with a direct quote of a small part of Leviticus 18:5: "The one who keeps [God's] statutes shall live." He joins it with a passage in Deuteronomy 30:11-14, which he rewrites and reframes. Deuteronomy 30:11 speaks of God's collective commandment that is neither hard nor far away. The next verse assures that God's command is not "up in heaven," that someone would have to ask who will ascend and get it.

Paul takes these words and makes them about Jesus by contrasting the righteousness that comes from the law with righteousness that comes from faith. Where Deuteronomy 30:14 says the word (of God's commandment) is near, on the lips and in the heart, Paul writes in Romans 10:8 that it is the word of faith that is near, on the lips and in the heart. Paul identifies that faith as the belief and confession that Jesus is Lord and has been raised from the dead. Surely Paul knows that Moses is enjoining the people in the wilderness to commit themselves to the Torah. So, what is he doing?

Paul interprets the ancient scriptures of his people in light of his current context and its pressing issues. He interprets what Jesus means to the world largely without challenging imperial structures such as slavery or even his own citizenship. We are not limited to Paul's limitations. We can and must critically examine our places of privilege as well as those of peril because both affect how we understand scripture.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

[AUGUST 20]

Nevertheless, She Persisted

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Psalm 67;
Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:10-28

FOREIGNERS AND outcasts are God's people, according to Isaiah 56; in the verses excised from the lectionary ("To the eunuchs who ... hold fast to my covenant—I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever"), those who don't conform to binary gender norms—eunuchs—are expressly welcome. As the legal, civil, and human rights of trans and other non-binary folk are being fought for and debated, excising those verses silences the Bible's word of welcome.

Psalm 67 extends the borders of God's community to all nations, all peoples, to the very ends of the earth (verse 7). Some have said that heaven has a gate so our nation should too. Gates, unlike walls, can welcome or exclude. These texts signal welcome across ethnic and national boundaries without preconditions. Moreover, the psalm proclaims that God does not show bias and judges and guides all peoples with equity that derives from God's unassailable integrity, "uprightness" in Hebrew (verse 4). In Romans 11 Paul rebukes Gentile Christians who seem to think they and only they are God's people. Later, Paul uses the beautiful analogy of an ancient tree with many branches onto which Gentiles have been grafted (verses 16b-24).

The pairing of Matthew 15 with these texts could be called ironic. Jesus seems not to know or abide by God's openhearted welcome. When a woman who is a "foreigner" per Isaiah 56 asks for his help to heal her child, he says he is only called to his people. This Jesus is uncomfortably ethnocentric. Nevertheless, she persisted, abasing herself, getting on her knees to beg him. In Matthew 15:26, Jesus says, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." His response equates the desperate mother with a bitch, a female dog. (The language may be strong for some, but the scriptures are strong.) Jesus' response also suggests he's operating from a theology of scarcity, as though God does not possess enough love and grace for all peoples.

This portrait of Jesus is scandalously

human, particularly if Jesus' humanity has only been understood physically and emotionally. Then Jesus is changed by her faith, by contact with someone different from him.

[AUGUST 27]

Beyond Mortality

Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 138; Romans 12:1-8;
Matthew 16:13-20

LISTEN. LOOK. Attend deeply. Isaiah 51 is a reflection on the nature of God, humanity, and the cosmos. God is the source of righteousness (verse 1), blessing (verse 2), comfort and restoration (verse 3), Torah—primarily meaning teaching—and justice (verse 4), deliverance (verse 5), and salvation (verses 5-6). As for humanity, this passage expects that some number seeks God and the values associated with her. Yet humanity is portrayed as needing touchstones of faith to mark their journey: "Look to Abraham your father." "Look to Sarah who gave birth to you." The cosmos is fully under God's control. Though the world is waste and wild, God will restore it to flourishing. But one day it will pass away, and all that will remain will be God and the salvation she offers the world.

This portion of Isaiah is made poignant by its timing. It is set after the fall of Jerusalem and reflects deep faith in God, despite the present circumstances, based in part on God's fidelity in the past. In contrast, the psalm is set much earlier, in the time of David. The psalm reflects devotion to God in a time of relative security compared to the setting of Isaiah 51. Yet it includes a reminder that trouble comes in times of security as well as in utter catastrophe (Psalm 138:7).

In Matthew 16, the disciples look to their religious and scriptural heritage to answer the question Jesus puts to them: Who do you say that I am? Jesus uses the ancient title *ben adam* to describe himself in verse 13. The title has been translated as "Son of Man," "Mortal One," and "Human One." The title could just as easily be translated as "Son of Woman." God addresses Ezekiel by that title to demonstrate his mortality. In Daniel's vision, the bearer of that title is no ordinary mortal! (Compare Ezekiel 3:10, 17, 25 with Daniel 7:13.) When Jesus uses that title, he invokes both senses. He is mortal and he is much more. ■



GOT SKILLS AND TIME TO SHARE?

Volunteer to be a leader —
project directors, cooks,
crew leaders,
office managers needed

JOIN THE TEAM

[mds.mennonite.net/
projectleaders](https://mds.mennonite.net/projectleaders)
717-735-3536



GROW

your audience!

"Advertising with Sojourners
has given us some of the best
response rates across our ad
channels. We know the audience
cares about our mission and the
advertising staff is a joy to work
with."

—Dan Ruth, Lutheran World Relief

Advertise with Sojourners today.
For more information, email
advertising@sojo.net or call
202-745-4601.

The Other Side of the 'News'

BEFORE WE BEGIN, I want to state unequivocally that I have never attempted to open back-channel communications with the Kremlin. I wouldn't even know where to look for a back channel, although I'm guessing it's down by the river. I state this partly as an admission that, in this city of nonstop intrigue, this cauldron of shocking and possibly treasonous revelations, this constant stream of leaks and denials, this torrent ...

... I'm sorry, where was I going with this? Oh, now I remember: I live in a city where each day brings another bombshell of treachery and betrayal, but I'm always the last to know. As a journalist, this hurts.

I mean, my office is so close to the action you'd think I'd hear some of this stuff firsthand. I can see the U.S. Capitol Building from our roof (speaking of our roof, anybody know

Somebody needs to cover it.

how to get bird poop off a chimney?), and the White House is just a stone's throw away, assuming you've got the arm.

But I'm not on the inside. I'm just the opposite. I'm ... (don't guess, let me get there) ... on the *outside*. In a city bubbling over with chicanery, I've not gotten one email from a whistle blower inside the government, not a single contact from an unnamed source, or even a phone call from Russian Ambassador Sergey Ivanovich Kislyak, whose name I've practiced pronouncing in case I see him at a cocktail party. Not that I'm invited to those any more since the last one, where I planted myself in front of the bowl of shrimp and pretty much ate it all. (I'm closing my eyes now, remembering the taste of the first couple dozen, the sweet tang of the cocktail sauce, and the two times I had to elbow the Russian ambassador out of the way.)



In a town where it seems everybody is getting secret meetings with the Russians, it's like Putin doesn't even know *I exist*. What is this, high school? (Just look at him, sitting over there with the cool kids. And wipe that smug look off your face, Jared. The only reason they let you join the Russia Club after school is because your dad bought you a car!)

SHUT OUT from the information flow of political Washington—and since most newspapers are already covering the countless missteps *inside* of the Trump administration—the only thing for me to cover is what's left: the *outside*, the part where you simply take the White House at its word. Its reality is my reality. *Su Casa Blanca, mi Casa Blanca*.

I admit, it will be easier. For one thing, everyone from journalists to economists are working hard to debunk the Trump administration's new budget as cruel and heartless to the poor. But it's a lot less work to take the White House at face value and report that the U.S. economy will soon experience 3 percent annual growth, that corporations will celebrate their historic tax cuts by building factories and hiring American workers again, and the sick, given no other choice, will just get better. We'll also get seconds on dessert.

Otherwise, what would be the point of lowering taxes on rich people and cutting the heart out of our safety net? It just wouldn't make sense.

Likewise, since the media is

extensively covering Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate accords—an action that exposes our disregard of science and longstanding agreements with trusted allies—it's left to me to cover the *other* story: While 195 countries have signed the accord, the U.S. has proudly joined Syria and Nicaragua to make up a powerful Coalition of the Remaining.

No matter that Nicaragua abstained because it felt the Paris accords didn't go far enough, or that Syria declined because, after years of crimes against humanity, its leaders are afraid they'll get arrested if they go someplace to sign something. (Nothing takes the fun out of Paris like a forced detour to The Hague.)

But our president does not yield the low ground. He longs for photogenic sunsets purpled by the haze from nearby coal plants, and gleefully anticipates inland property values rising as they soon become waterfront, with lovely views stretching from sea to rising seas.

SO YOU SEE, when you're a journalist on the outside there are no heavy rocks to turn over, no noxious swamps to empty, no anxiety about our Constitution slowly being shredded. (Bird cages aren't going to line themselves, after all.) Reporting is a piece of cake, which we can now let them eat. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.



Find home. Create home.

For more than 40 years, Sojourners has worked to create spaces of healing and rest for the outsider, the marginalized, the foreigner, and *you*.

If you believe justice is born out of community, we invite you to join **Sojourners Sustainers Circle**, our community of 2,000 Sojourners friends who have committed to be monthly donors. Your monthly gift—no matter how large or small—helps Sojourners continue to engage in the work of God's hospitality and transform the world with freedom and justice.

Start your monthly gift at sojo.net/givemonthly or, to begin automatic monthly bank withdrawals, send a voided check to:

Sojourners

Attn: Advancement

P.O. Box 70730

Washington, DC 20024-0730

Journey with us.

sojourners
sojo.net

New from Forward Movement



Broken

By Ryan Casey Waller

Before Jesus broke the bread, he blessed it.

In the age of social media, our lives are curated to show only our best and most beautiful selves, so it is easy to believe we are the only ones who are broken. But we are not alone. We are all broken and in need of God's blessing. No one has it all together - no person is perfect. In essays both humorous and achingly vulnerable, author Ryan Casey Waller encourages us to join him in pouring out our brokenness - to God and to each other.

\$22 \$18

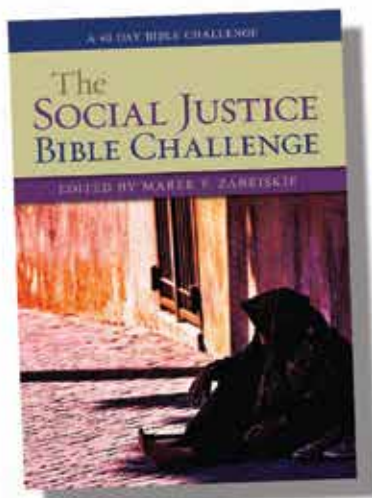
256 pages | 978-0-88028-441-7

Ryan Casey Waller is a preacher and teacher, a father, and a (recovering) lawyer.

Preorder
Today!
Available on
September
4



Order at ForwardMovement.org



The Social Justice Bible Challenge

The Social Justice Bible Challenge bridges the gap between knowing the Bible and living it.

Drawing from Old and New Testament books—and most especially from the words of Jesus—this new offering from The Bible Challenge series welcomes us to listen to God's desires for how we should treat the least among us. Disciples wishing to spend more time engaging the Bible on topics from poverty, hunger, displacement, and the care of widows and orphans will have their cups filled over and over again by the words of Scripture and meditations from people across the Church who engage with these realities each and every day. Editor and founder of The Bible Challenge, Marek P. Zabriskie reminds each of us that, "The poor are on God's heart and should be on ours. We are called to fight poverty and injustice wherever we find it."

\$15

192 pages | 978-0-88028-450-9

Order at ForwardMovement.org



Forward
Movement

inspire disciples. empower evangelists.

Find these and other inspiring titles at
ForwardMovement.org